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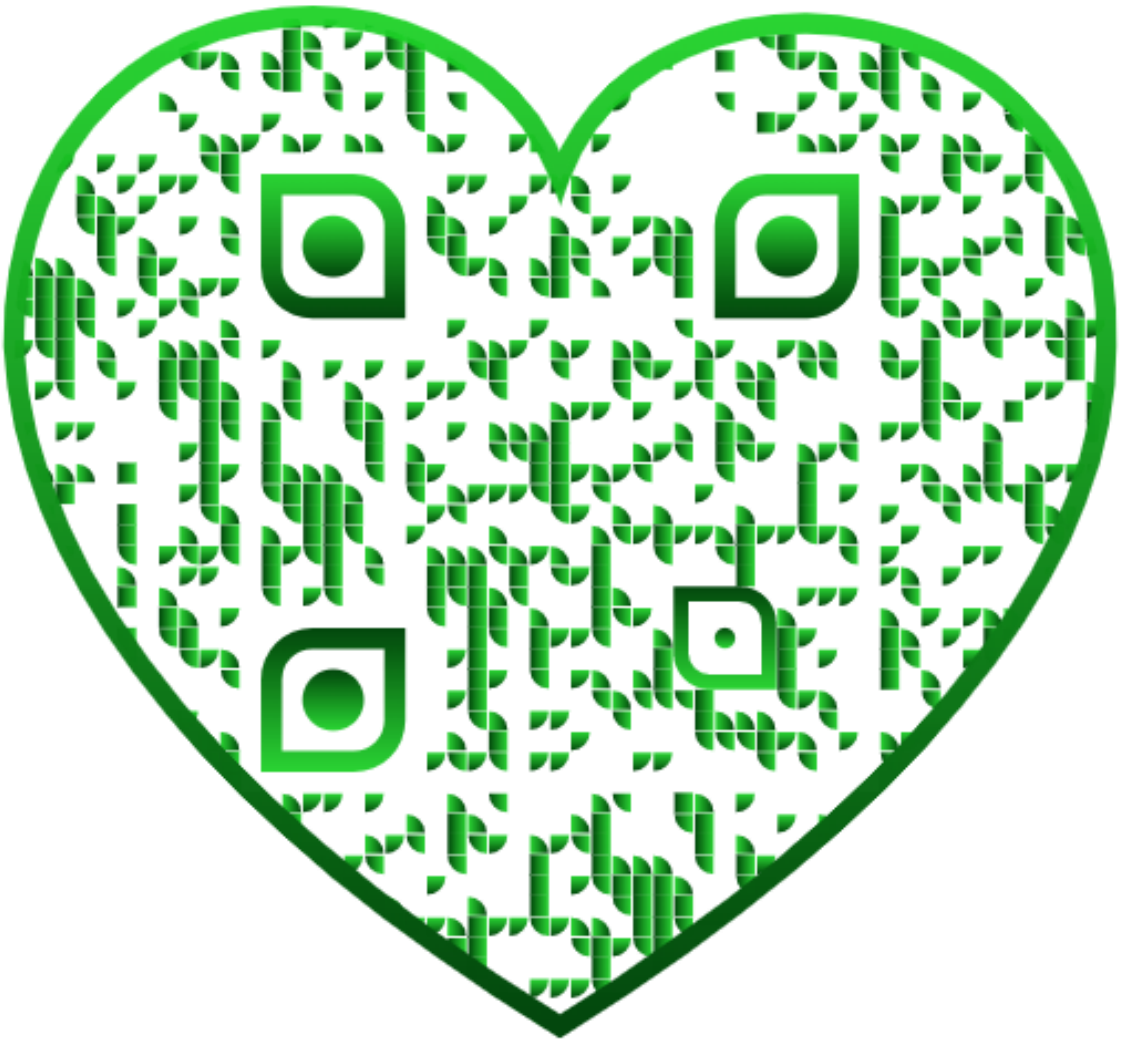
CHARLES RIVER EDITORS

FLAT EARTH AND HOLLOW EARTH THEORIES

A History of Strange Tales and Bizarre Beliefs about the Planet



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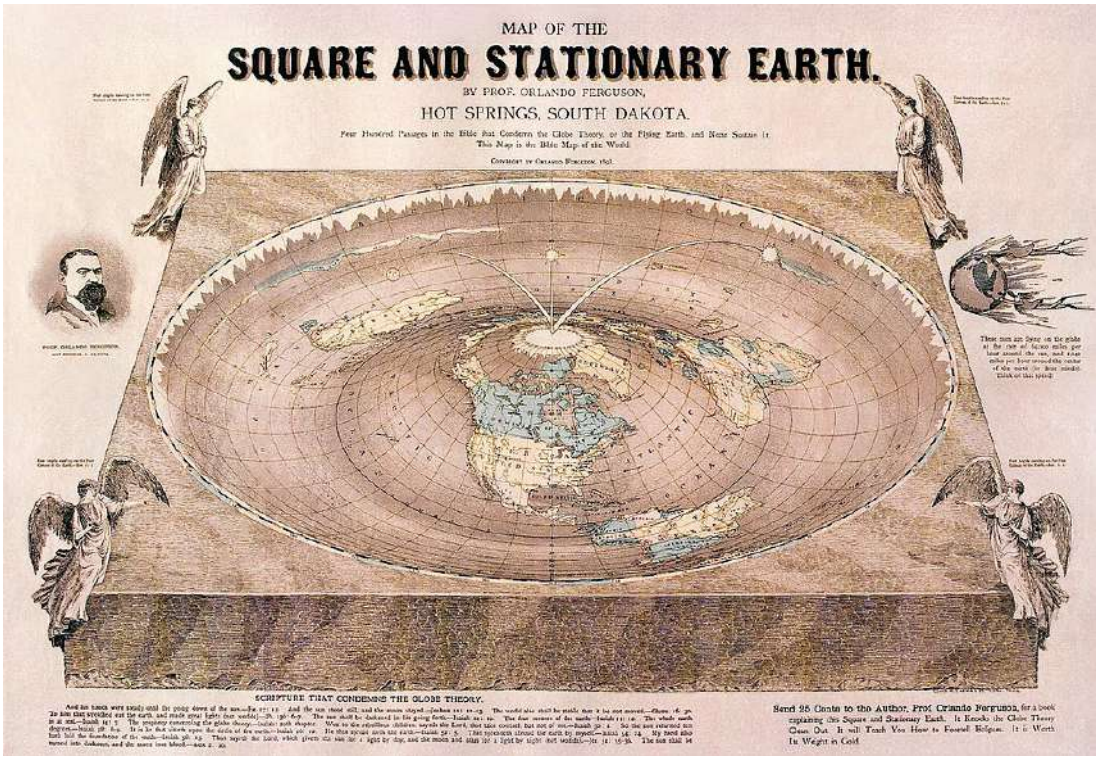
Flat Earth and Hollow Earth Theories: A History of Strange Tales and Bizarre Beliefs about the Planet

By Charles River Editors


MAP OF THE
SQUARE AND STATIONARY EARTH.
BY PROF. ORLANDO FERGUSON,
HOT SPRINGS, SOUTH DAKOTA.
Four Hundred Passages in the Bible that Condemn the Globe Theory, or the Flying Earth, and Note Source of
This Map is the Bible Map of the World.
SCRIPTURE THAT CONDEMNS THE GLOBE THEORY.
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Orlando Ferguson’s map of the flat Earth

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About the Author

Sean McLachlan spent many years working as an archaeologist in Europe, the Middle East, and the United States. Now a full-time writer, he's the author of many history books and novels, including *A Fine Likeness* , a Civil War novel with a touch of the paranormal. Feel free to visit him on his Amazon page and blog .

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Introduction

A diagram of the "Interior World" of Atvatabar, from William R. Bradshaw's *The Goddess of Atvatabar* (1892)

The world is filled with mysteries, and even in the modern age, much of the planet remains unexplored. The depths of the oceans and the intricate and extensive cave systems that honeycomb some parts of the Earth are still largely unknown. Thus, it should come as no surprise that when it comes to this *terra incognita* , people have projected all sorts of ideas. Tales of sunken cities or lost civilizations are just some of the fanciful theories, and those could even be considered tame in comparison to the idea that Earth is flat and/or hollow.

Despite this notion being rejected by the scientific community for millennia, and despite the fact that geology, volcanology, oceanography, and physics have all proven that the planet is not flat, the idea of a hollow Earth continues to intrigue people and gain eager and sincere adherents. This is made all the more remarkable by the fact that space programs are

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more than 60 years old, and people can fly around the world on planes in a matter of hours.

Taken at face value, the ideas are patently ridiculous, but they provoke strong emotions in some people, sincere people who have thought extensively about their beliefs. These people feel they are privy to a hidden truth, and that the rest of the world is wrong and ignorant, but this feeling of mental superiority isn't the only appeal in clinging to radical notions. There is also the thrill of adventure, the feeling that one is part of a dangerous minority attempting to overthrow the dominant paradigm. It is far better, some would feel, to live in a world full of mystery and hope than a decaying, "rational" world where everything can be explained but nothing solved.

Flat Earth and Hollow Earth Theories: A History of Strange Tales and Bizarre Beliefs about the Planet offers a sampling of the many strange stories and theories regarding the planet's surface and interior. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the theories like never before.

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Ancient Beliefs

The ancients can be forgiven for thinking the world was flat, given that the Earth was far too large for people to travel around it. Indeed, even when people are standing on a mountain, the world looks flat enough, and the idea of being on a spinning globe hurtling through space was counterintuitive to those who had no understanding of astronomy or physics. Thus, it's little surprise that for much of history, people assumed the Earth was flat, and if anything, it is likely most people gave no thought to it at all, consumed as they were by the daily struggle to live. Diseases, war, and grinding manual labor were prevalent in most people's lives, and they didn't have time to spend on geographic musings.

That said, ancient civilizations had priests and scholars who pondered the mysteries of the world, and some of them turned their minds to wondering about the shape of the Earth. Both the Mesopotamians and ancient Egyptians thought the world was flat and riding on a vast ocean - the Mesopotamians pictured the world as a disk while the Egyptians thought it was square in shape. The ancient Israelites also thought of the world as a disk floating on an ocean, and that the world was capped with a solid dome into which all the celestial bodies were embedded.

Chinese scholars believed the world was flat and square, and they disputed the makeup of the heavens. Some said it hung over the Earth like an umbrella, but others believed it was a sphere surrounding it. Some got closer to the truth by saying it had no substance at all and that the heavenly bodies floated within it. Given the conservatism of learning there, no advance was made on the model of the world until contacts with European traders in the 17th century introduced the idea of a round Earth.

The Indian civilizations were more advanced in this respect. While the Vedic texts, the foundation of Hindu belief, depict the world as flat or concave, and disk shaped, in later times astronomy became a science on the subcontinent. By the 5th century CE, astronomers had realized the Earth was a globe and many philosophers incorporated this knowledge into their beliefs. Some historians have suggested that the Indian scholars were influenced by contemporary Greek learning, but the general belief is that they came to these findings independently.

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The earlier Greeks believed in a disk world surrounded by water, and Greek philosophers argued incessantly over the exact nature of this world. Anaximander (c. 610-546 BCE) believed the Earth was a stubby cylinder with a flat, circular top, and the cylinder was only about a third as high as it was broad so one could also think of it as a thick disk. People lived on the top, and this cylinder hovered unsupported and did not move because it was at the center of everything, a curiously early formulation of a Lagrangian point. In Anaximander's model, the sky was not solid or a dome, but rather a series of concentric wheels inside which the celestial bodies are fixed and along which they move. These wheels had holes in them so people can see the celestial bodies, but the holes in the rims of the wheels could sometimes be blocked, thus explaining the phases of the Moon and eclipses. Since the Earth floats in nothingness, this model allowed for celestial bodies to move beneath the Earth, a simple explanation for why they rise and set. He also thought of the Sun as a massive body that was very far away. Anaximander's model even allowed for other worlds to be born and perish, and no matter how he came to it, he was correct in believing that the Earth had a limited lifespan.

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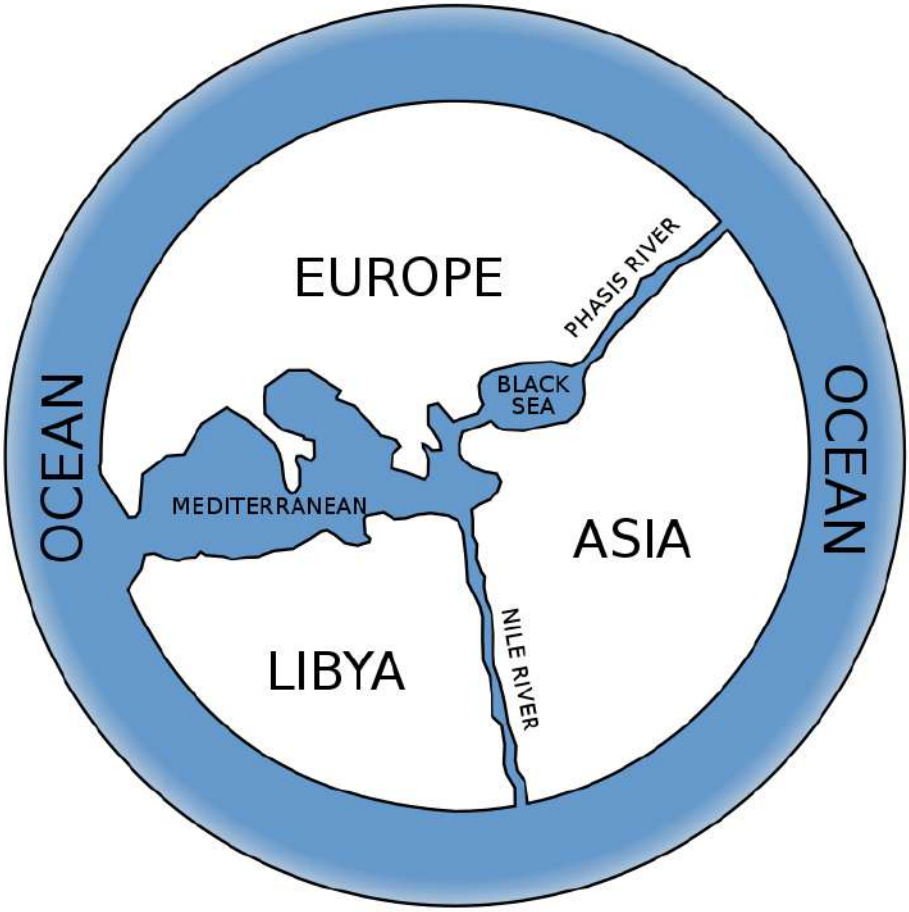

A rendering of Anaximander’s theory of the world

Anaximenes of Miletus (c. 586–526 BCE) believed “the Earth is flat and rides on air; in the same way the sun and the moon and the other heavenly bodies, which are all fiery, ride the air because of their flatness.” He compared these bodies to leaves floating in the breeze. The Sun and Moon are flat disks like the Earth, with their faces pointing in the planet’s direction. They orbit the Earth but do not go underneath it, instead being obscured by mountains at the edge of our planet.

Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 570–475 BCE) theorized that the Earth was flat, with its upper side touching the air and the lower side going down without limit. Like Anaximander, he believed in an infinite number of worlds being born and eventually perishing. Interestingly, Xenophanes was also an early proponent of evolution, another scientific theory rejected by most Flat Earthers. He studied fossils and realized that the only explanation

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for finding fossils of fish and other sea creatures high up the slopes of mountains was that the world must have once been covered in water. He believed that all life formed out of water and primordial mud.

These early Greeks came up with creative explanations for the nature of Earth, but eventually, other ancient Greeks made one of the most influential leaps of scientific knowledge by postulating that the Earth was a globe. In the 6th century BCE, two natural philosophers came up with the idea. Parmenides of Elea (c. 515 BCE) was perhaps the first to propose a globe model, but the more famous Pythagoras (c. 570-495 BCE) also espoused this view and has generally been credited with the discovery. Their theories were widely accepted among educated Greeks by the end of the 5th century BCE, and with that, the Earth was seen as the center of the universe with the Sun, Moon, planets, and stars orbiting around it. This geocentric model lasted far longer than the idea of a Flat Earth and wasn't disproved until Copernicus published his seminal work *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*) in 1543. While others had proposed a heliocentric model before him, including the ancient Greek astronomer Aristarchus of Samos (c. 310-230 BCE), it was Copernicus who changed many minds and helped shift science in a new direction.

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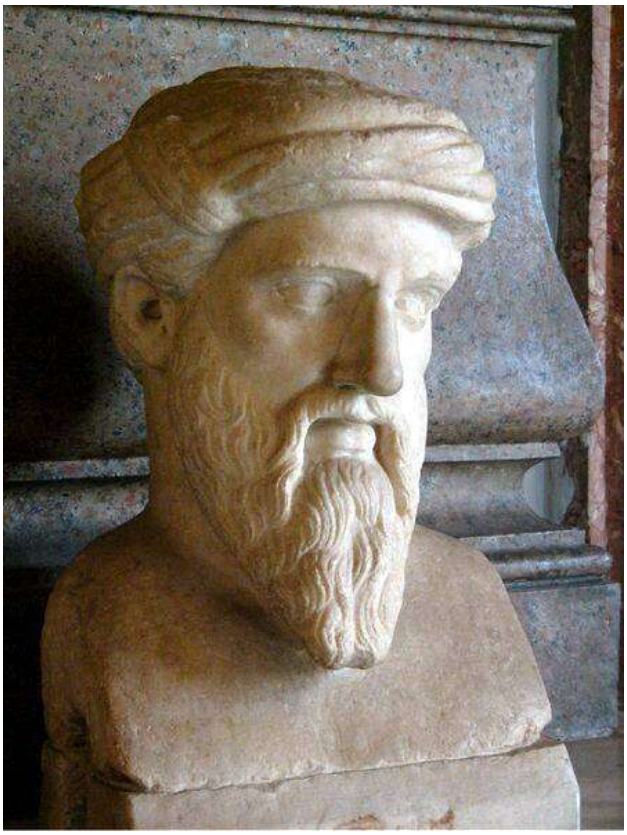

A bust of Pythagoras

Perhaps the last holdout for the Flat Earth model among Greek philosophers was Archelaus (lived sometime in the fifth century BCE). He had an interesting variant on the model suggesting that the Earth was depressed in the middle like a saucer. This would allow for the sun to rise and set at different times depending on where in the Earth you were. The common observation that the days in northern and southern latitudes are longer in summer and shorter in winter than on the equator has always been a troubling one for proponents of the Flat Earth model.

Archelaus was a man born too late. By his day, the consensus was that the Earth was a globe, although little was known beyond that. Eratosthenes of Cyrene (c. 276-194 BCE) took humanity’s knowledge a step further by calculating the circumference of the Earth. This Greek scholar lived in Egypt, and he knew that on the summer solstice, the Sun at noon was directly overhead at Syene, modern Aswan, near the present border between Egypt and Sudan. It was well known that the Sun on that day shone down to the bottom of a deep well, proving it was directly overhead. Eratosthenes

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knew the distance between Syene and Alexandria on the Mediterranean and, assuming a perfectly spherical Earth, he figured out that he could determine its size by measuring the angle of the sun at Alexandria on noon of the same day. Being a different spot on the globe, the Sun would not be directly overhead, and by measuring its angle and doing some simple math, he could discover the angular distance between the two cities.

This he did with a measuring rod called a gnomon, measuring its shadow on the ground. Knowing the length of the rod and the length of the shadow, he could see these as two sides of a triangle and thus calculate the angle of the Sun's rays. The angle was close to seven degrees, or two percent of the circumference of a circle. Thus, he asserted that the circumference of the Earth was 50 times the distance between Alexandria and Syene.

The figure Eratosthenes came up with was 252,000 stadia, a measurement that had various lengths in ancient times, given that there was no universal standard of measurement. It is not clear what particular stade Eratosthenes used, but their lengths are all known and can be converted into modern measurements that give a range from 27,400-32,500 miles (44,100-52,300 kilometers). The actual figure is about 24,860 miles, and given the crudity of the instruments with which he had to work, the fact that he did not know the precise distance between Alexandria and Syene, and the fact that the Earth is actually an oblate spheroid and not perfectly spherical as he assumed, Eratosthenes's measurements were remarkable achievements. Even if his figures were slightly off, he correctly demonstrated that the Earth is round.

After that, the Greeks almost unanimously accepted that the world was round, a belief that was adopted (like so much other Greek knowledge) by their admirers and conquerors, the Romans. One of the few Romans to rebel against this belief was Titus Lucretius Carus (99-55 BCE), who wrote in *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*) that it was ridiculous to believe that people on the other side of the world walked upside down, a sentiment expressed more than 2,000 years later by modern Flat Earthers. In this regard, Carus was truly a final holdout, because much of the ancient world was now firmly convinced of the round Earth, and this was passed along to the Muslim civilizations and the European medieval civilizations.

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One factor that muddied the waters for some people was the introduction of Christianity, as the Bible, which was taken to be the highest authority on all things, contains a number of passages that seem to indicate the Earth is flat. For example, in the description of the Temptation of Christ in Matthew 4:8, the gospel said, “The Devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.” This would indicate that from a sufficiently high point, one could see the entire world, something that wouldn’t be possible if the Earth was a globe. The story is repeated in Luke 4:5, and a similar passage is found in Daniel 4:10-11, which reads, “Before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth.” This statement suggested a high object is visible from every point in the world, implying a plane rather than a globe. It is also stated that the Earth has ends and the sky is something that can be touched, supporting the “enclosed disk and vault” theory.

Some passages, such as Isaiah 11:12 and Revelation 7:1, mention the “four corners of the earth,” which followers of the Flat Earth model have taken to mean that the world is not only a plane, but a square or rectangle.

Job 26:7 has this interesting passage: “He [God] spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing.” This has been taken to mean that there is nothing beneath the world, thus the stars, Sun, and Moon do not go to the other side of the world when they set.

In the First Book of Chronicles 16:30, it says, “The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved.” The same line is repeated in Psalms 93:1, which has been taken by many readers both in the Middle Ages and more modern times to mean that the Earth could not be orbiting the Sun or hurtling through space at fantastic speeds like astronomers have determined.

While these passages could have created trouble for people who followed the globe model of the Earth, they actually hurt the progress of learning very little. Classical learning did not disappear entirely during the so-called “Dark Ages” in Europe, and most of the limited scholarship in Western Europe during the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire continued teaching the globe model. The Byzantine Empire also maintained the globe model.

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Some leading thinkers, however, rejected the idea, and one of the most important was Saint Augustine. In his book *The City of God* , the influential Church father wrote, “But as to the fable that there are Antipodes, that is to say, men on the opposite side of the earth, where the sun rises when it sets to us, men who walk with their feet opposite ours, that is on no ground credible. And, indeed, it is not affirmed that this has been learned by historical knowledge, but by scientific conjecture, on the ground that the earth is suspended within the concavity of the sky, and that it has as much room on the one side of it as on the other: hence they say that the part which is beneath must also be inhabited. But they do not remark that, although it be supposed or scientifically demonstrated that the world is of a round and spherical form, yet it does not follow that the other side of the earth is bare of water; nor even, though it be bare, does it immediately follow that it is peopled. For Scripture, which proves the truth of its historical statements by the accomplishment of its prophecies, gives no false information; and it is too absurd to say, that some men might have taken ship and traversed the whole wide ocean, and crossed from this side of the world to the other, and that thus even the inhabitants of that distant region are descended from that one first man. Wherefore let us seek if we can find the city of God that sojourns on earth among those human races who are catalogued as having been divided into seventy-two nations and as many languages. For it continued down to the deluge and the ark, and is proved to have existed still among the sons of Noah by their blessings, and chiefly in the eldest son Shem; for Japheth received this blessing, that he should dwell in the tents of Shem.”

A close reading of this text does not demonstrate an explicit rejection of the globe model, merely the idea of people living on the other side of the world. Nevertheless, because of Saint Augustine’s importance in Church learning, his words created hostility among some members of the clergy to the globe model.

Another leading Church figure who supported the idea that the Earth is flat and floats on a vast sea was Saint John Chrysostom (c. 349- 407), Archbishop of Constantinople and one of the fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

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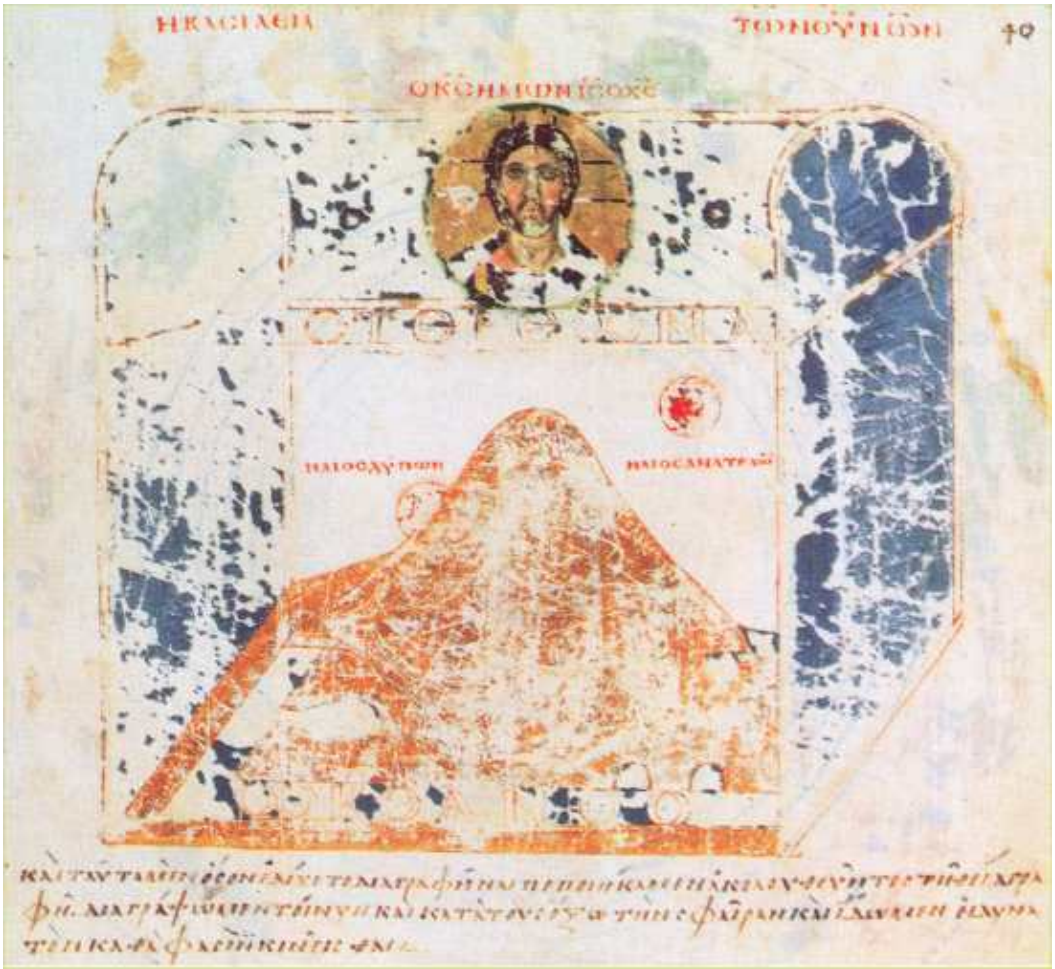
Cosmas Indicopleustes (6th century CE), a far-traveling monk from Alexandria, wrote an influential geography titled *Christian Topography* in 547, and in it he described the Earth as a rectangle with a length that would take 400 days to journey across and a width that would take 200 days to travel through. He wrote that there are oceans on each side which cannot be reached because of four huge walls that hold up the sky. Ironically, despite the fact he journeyed as far as India and Abyssinia, Cosmas based his geography on Scripture rather than personal observations, and despite living in the greatest seat of Western learning, he ignored Classical arguments for a round Earth as nothing but pagan heresy. He fell into the trap of many Flat Earthers in finding passages in the Bible that seemed to indicate a Flat Earth, and therefore no amount of scientific observation could convince him the world was round.



A depiction of Cosmas' worldview

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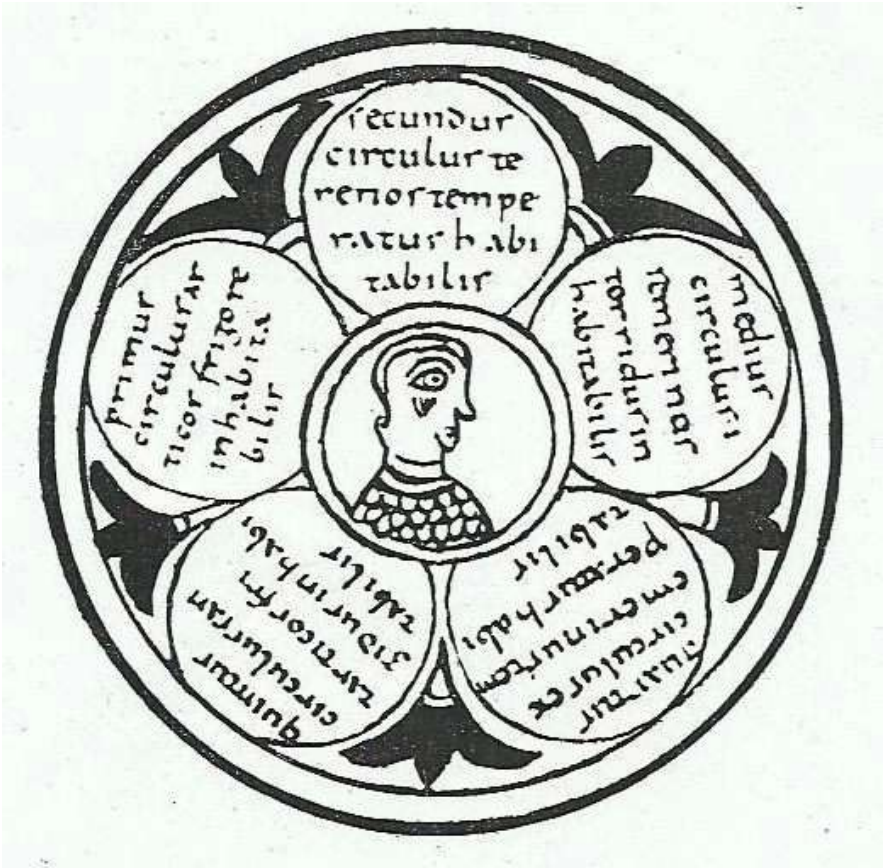
While these writers left a lasting impression, the majority of Christian scholars in the Middle Ages still believed the Earth was a globe, despite the fact that Classical manuscripts were in very short supply. One geography by Macrobius (early 5th century) depicted a spherical Earth surrounded by planetary spheres, and this work was copied numerous times in the Early Middle Ages in places such as France and Ireland. Boethius (c. 480–524) relied on Macrobius for his discussion of the nature of the Earth in his hugely influential *Consolation of Philosophy* . Bishop Isidore of Seville (560–636) wrote in his popular book, *De Natura Rerum* , that the Earth is a globe with the Sun revolving around it, giving day to one side and night to the other.

In his widely read encyclopedia *Etymologies* , considered by medieval scholars as one of the most learned treatises ever written, Isidore wrote that the sky is a sphere with the Earth at the center. He also correctly described eclipses of the Sun as occurring because the Moon passes between the Earth and the Sun. Lunar eclipses happen because the Moon passes into the shadow of the Earth, thus implying a spherical Earth.



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Isidore's portrayal of the five zones of the Earth

The famous English theologian Bede (c. 672–735) found support in Scripture for a spherical Earth by citing the Bible's mentions of "the orb of the world." An equally important Christian thinker, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), also taught that the Earth is a sphere.

All the while, there continued to be attempts to precisely calculate Earth's circumference. Hermann of Reichenau (1013–1054), a German Benedictine monk who was later made a saint, discussed Eratosthenes's measurement of the Earth, as preserved in the works of Macrobius, and agreed with the Greek's result.

Arab scholars, having preserved the works of Classical writers better than the Europeans themselves, were familiar with early discussions of the nature of the Earth, and numerous Muslim scholars throughout the Middle Ages repeated that the Earth was a sphere. For example, ibn Hazm (994-1064) asserted that despite common people thinking the Earth is flat, all evidence pointed to it being a sphere and that no one should be an imam if they argued otherwise.

A longstanding myth that has become a fixture of pop culture in the West is that Christopher Columbus sought to prove the world was round, but the claim that the ignorant Spaniards and Portuguese of the 15th century believed in a Flat Earth seems to have been first introduced by the American writer Washington Irving, whose 1828 biography of the explorer romanticized Columbus by depicting him as a visionary advocate of empirical science in the face of medieval obscurantism.

This characterization was at best highly exaggerated and at worst an outright falsification, because Columbus certainly drew some of the evidence for the feasibility of his plans from the empirical discoveries of Portuguese explorers, but he also drew heavily on the traditional authorities, including the Bible, Aristotle, Ptolemy, Pliny and the more recent cosmography of Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly. Columbus' true disagreement with many of his contemporaries had to do with a different question: the true circumference of the Earth, and the relative amount of its surface covered by land and by water. Different geographers and cosmographers had come to different conclusions, and there was confusion regarding Eratosthenes's

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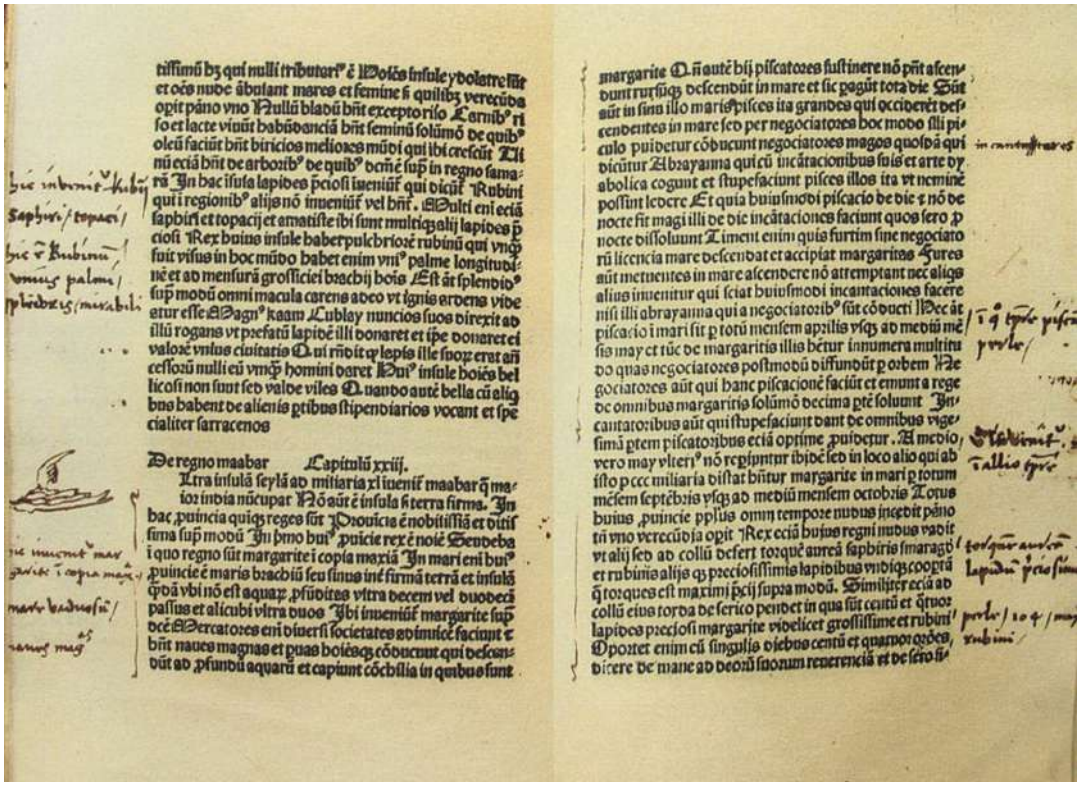
estimates brought about by the different systems and units of measurement used successively by Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and medieval Christians. Such confusion contributed to Columbus's calculation of a much shorter distance between the western tip of Europe and the eastern tip of Asia, which was based off what he read.

Columbus ultimately concluded that Asia lay at a distance of just under 2,500 miles, which makes Irving's depiction of Columbus as a scientific pioneer incredibly ironic. As it turned out, the real distance was about 12,500 miles, putting Asia over four times further away than Columbus anticipated. Historian Edmund Morgan noted, "Columbus was not a scholarly man. Yet he studied these books, made hundreds of marginal notations in them and came out with ideas about the world that were characteristically simple and strong and sometimes wrong, the kind of ideas that the self-educated person gains from independent reading and clings to in defiance of what anyone else tries to tell him."



Columbus' notes in Latin on the margins of his copy of *The Travels of Marco Polo*

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The experts who ridiculed Columbus, far from being ignorant Flat Earthers, were actually working from highly accurate measurements and had good reason to believe that Columbus' expedition would run out of water and supplies before reaching Asia. They only lacked one important piece of information: there was another land mass between Europe and Asia.

Put simply, if Columbus hadn't chanced upon the Americas, he wouldn't have sailed over the edge of the Earth, but he and his crew would've almost certainly been left permanently adrift, never to be heard from again.

Early Theories about a Hollow Earth

The idea of a world beneath our own was common in a number of ancient religions. From Mesopotamia and the Classical cultures to those of the Far East and Native America, stories of underworlds abound. In the Middle East and Europe, these tend to be the abodes of the dead, while in Native American cultures, they are often the lands from which their ancestors emerged onto the Earth. In more modern times, Christianity's idea of Hell is generally thought to be beneath the earth, although no Scripture or, indeed, the creed of any established church, explicitly states that that is its location.

One early attempt to make it into the interior of the earth is worth mentioning. On Station Island in Lough Derg, County Donegal, Ireland is a cave that local religious tradition states is the entrance to Purgatory. In the 5th century CE, St. Patrick was passing through the area converting the Irish when Christ appeared to him and showed him the cave. The saint had grown despondent because the pagan Irish had grave doubts about the existence of the Christian afterlife. St. Patrick prayed to God to give him proof to show the people. Christ appeared and led him to the entrance to Purgatory, so that he may show the unbelievers the sufferings of those who didn't embrace Christianity.

St. Patrick's Purgatory, as it is called, appeared on many early modern maps and became a center for pilgrimage, with several churches that could be visited in order to pray and attend Mass. As for Purgatory itself, pilgrims' accounts describe a narrow entrance just two feet wide and three feet high, sealed with a door leading to a short flight of steps and two small underground rooms. The first was only 9 feet long and too low to stand, and

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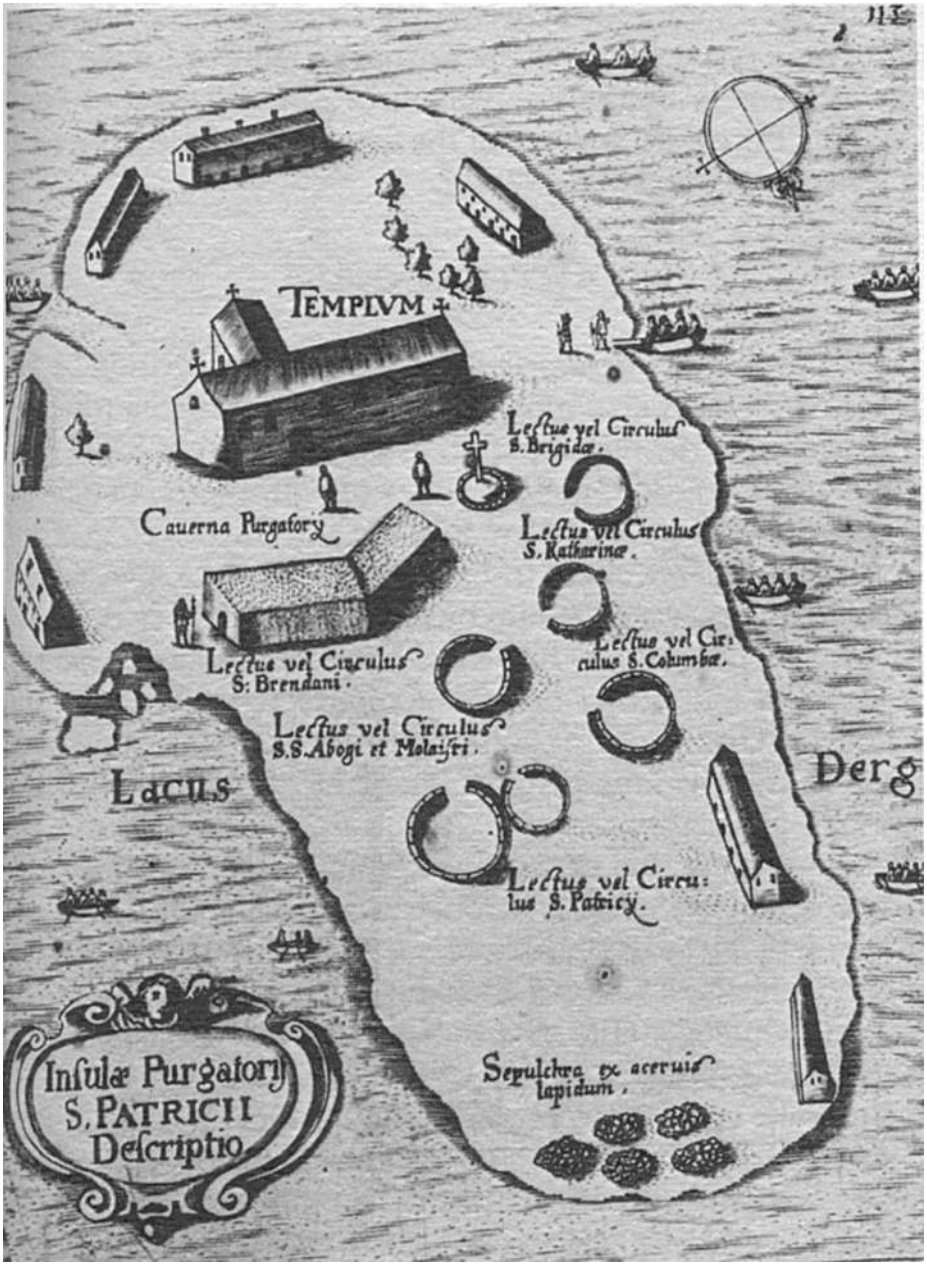
the second room was only about 5 feet long. Of course, this was hardly a Hollow Earth; indeed, most descriptions of the underworld in ancient and medieval religion only speak of large caverns, not a hollow globe.



A 17 th century map of St. Patrick's Purgatory

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A modern picture of the site on Station Island

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Andreas Borchert's picture of the St. Patrick statue on the island

The monastery was dissolved in 1632, and the entrance to Purgatory was locked on the 25th of October of that year. Since then, no one has seen it, yet even today, pilgrims still make the journey to pray at what they believe to be the entrance to the underworld.

The idea of the Hollow Earth gained credence beyond the religious world through a paper written by no less a figure than Edmond Halley (1656-1742), Astronomer Royal of England. He remains most famous for computing the orbit of Halley's Comet and precisely predicting when it

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would return, thereby proving these celestial bodies orbit the sun like other objects in the solar system.

Halley

Halley was one of the most respected scientists of his day, writing widely on astronomy, meteorology, geology, and physics. In 1692, he wrote a paper trying to explain “the slow changes suffered by the variation of the compass” that were vexing mariners in the Age of Exploration, as well as the inexplicable difference between the geographic and magnetic poles. His theory was that the earth was made up of concentric spheres with atmosphere between them. In other words, the world as people knew it was only a shell 500 miles thick, with two inner concentric shells around a small solid core. Gravity kept these concentric spheres in their places, avoiding any catastrophic collisions. Each of these spheres rotated at a different speed and had its own magnetic polarity, and it was this that caused the strange compass readings. He thought the interior spheres were luminous, writing that “the concave arches may in several places shine with such a substance as invests the surface of the Sun.” He even believed they could perhaps support life. Escaping gas from these inner worlds was what caused

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the Northern Lights. The crust of the earth, he explained, was thinner in the polar regions and had cracks through which the atmosphere of the Inner Earths could escape.

Unlike most everything else that Halley wrote, this theory was not widely accepted, but it proved to be popular reading material. Nevertheless, Halley stuck to his guns and, in his final portrait as Astronomer Royal at age 80, he is shown holding a diagram of his concentric earth model.

A Revival of the Flat Earth Theory

By the Middle Ages, the majority of scholars and theologians believed the Earth was a sphere, and during the Renaissance and modern times, few

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people with any decent level of education questioned whether the world was a globe. While Columbus may not have been correct in his estimate of the planet's circumference, his historic voyage in 1492 was the most important in driving the Age of Discovery, and as European powers settled around the world, the globe model became widely known even to the common people, assuming they ever thought otherwise.

In the 19th century, however, some eccentrics began to theorize the world was flat, while others postulated that even if the world was a globe, it was hollow with habitable space inside. A rise in literacy rates, cheaper postage, and cheaper printing costs meant there was an explosion of all kinds of popular literature, and in an era that popularized New Age beliefs, conspiracy theories, and different cult and religious practices, books and pamphlets on strange theories found a ready audience.

One of the early proponents of the Flat Earth was Englishman Samuel Birley Rowbotham (1816-1884). A naturally bright and quick-witted person, he found school not to his liking and left at the age of 9. He was deeply religious and took the Bible literally, and at a young age he was attracted to Owenism, a utopian socialist movement that founded several communes, one of which Rowbotham organized.

Rowbotham

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During this time, he began to formulate alternative ideas to the makeup of the Earth and decided to experiment to test them. His first tests were on the Bedford Level starting in 1838. This drainage canal, with placid waters and a 6 mile (9.7 kilometers) stretch that runs straight as an arrow, was perfect for measuring the curvature (or flatness) of the Earth. The idea was simple and had been done before - the experimenter would use a telescope to observe marker points set out along the level. As Rowbotham explained, “If the earth is a globe, and is 25,000 English statute miles in circumference, the surface of all standing water must have a certain degree of convexity—every part must be an arc of a circle. From the summit of any such arc there will exist a curvature or declination of 8 inches in the first statute mile. In the second mile the fall will be 32 inches; in the third mile, 72 inches, or 6 feet …”

Rowbotham stood in the river with a telescope held 8 inches (20 centimeters) above the water’s surface and watched a boat row away from him with a flag on its mast 3 feet (91 centimeters) above the surface of the water. The boat rowed six miles from him to a bridge. If the Earth was curved, the boat should have gone out of sight, but Rowbotham claimed to have seen the boat clearly for its entire route.

The results convinced Rowbotham that he was on to something, so in 1849, he published his results in a pamphlet (later expanded into a book) titled *Earth Not A Globe* . He used the pseudonym Parallax, perhaps fearing public persecution if he used his real name.

In time, Rowbotham began to lecture around the country on his theory of the Flat Earth, and at first, things did not go all that well because he hadn’t thought through many of the possible objections. During one talk in Blackburn, a member of the audience asked him why the hulls of distant ships disappeared over the horizon before the masts. Stumped for an answer, Rowbotham ran out of the lecture hall. He quickly improved, however, showing a talent for thinking on his feet and burying logical objections under a flurry of scientific-sounding responses.

In 1864, some scientists decided to disprove him once and for all by challenging him to come to Plymouth seaside and look through a telescope at Eddystone Lighthouse 14 miles (22.5 kilometers) out to sea. From that distance, due to the curvature of the Earth, only the very top of the lantern

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was visible and the rest of the lighthouse was under the horizon. Rowbotham duly turned up, looked through the telescope, and declared that he could see the entire lighthouse. When the scientists sputtered that he could see no such thing, he blithely repeated that he could and that it proved the Earth was flat. He seemed so sure of himself that many in the crowd left thinking he had won the debate.

Those scientists had just been given life lessons that some people still struggle to digest: a lie travels much faster than the truth, and if a lie is told enough times with enough conviction, it can change people's minds. The scientific community could try to argue on the basis of logic and facts, but if their counterparts are operating with an entirely different ideology, they become unreachable.

Rowbotham began to gather supporters, and in 1870, one of them, John Hampden, offered a bet that no one could disprove Rowbotham's results on the Bedford Level. The editor of a sports magazine called *The Field* , smelling good publicity, offered to act as referee. Eventually, Alfred Russel Wallace, a naturalist and surveyor, took Hampden up on the bet. Wallace knew that atmospheric refraction can bend light close to the Earth's surface, especially in areas of temperature inversion like people find over water, so to reduce this effect, he set a sightline 13 feet (4 meters) above the surface of the water and put a pole in the middle of the Bedford Level in order to measure the curve of the Earth as seen from the two endpoints. Wallace's experiment indicated that the surface of the Earth did indeed curve and the magazine awarded him the prize, but Hampden insisted that the money be returned to him, claiming Wallace had cheated and in any case he had retracted the offer before the experiment got underway. There followed a long court case which ended with the ruling that Wallace had to return the money because Hampden really had withdrawn the offer. That was cold comfort for Hampden, who was already in jail for threatening to kill Wallace.

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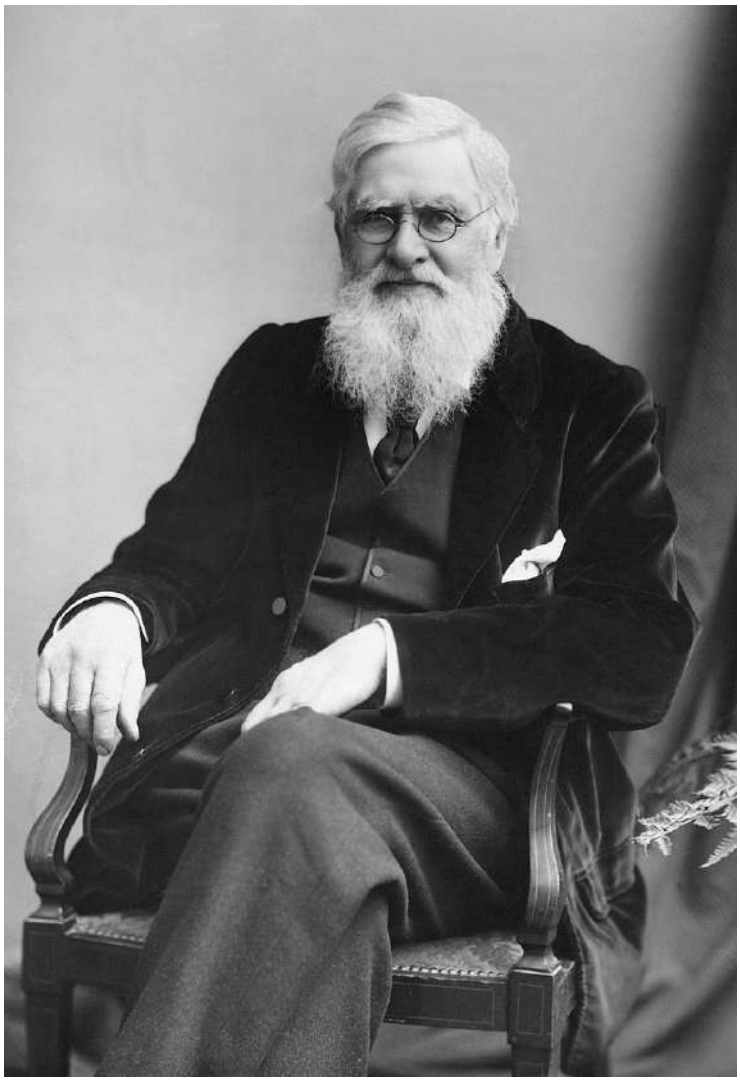

Wallace

Meanwhile Rowbotham continued to lecture on his theories, and they got even more elaborate with time. He called his studies “Zetetic Astronomy,” and as he explained in his book, “The term Zetetic is derived from the Greek verb zeteo; which means to search, or examine; to proceed only by inquiry; to take nothing for granted, but to trace phenomena to their immediate and demonstrable causes. It is here used in contradistinction from the word ‘theoretic,’ the meaning of which is, speculative--imaginary--not tangible,--scheming, but not proving.” Rowbotham was a Biblical literalist, taking the Bible as one hundred percent factual and thus the mentions of the Earth being flat must reflect the truth. Beneath the world’s oceans is a vast plain of fire (that for some reason doesn’t heat up the water), and this is where Hell is. Heaven is somewhere above the stars.

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Rowbotham's theory stipulated that the Earth was a flat disk, with the North Pole at the center and all the lands surrounded by the Antarctic Ocean bordered by a large cliff of ice, with a land of ice and snow stretching infinitely beyond. The Sun, Moon, planets, and stars are only a few hundred miles above the surface of the disk, with the Sun orbiting the North Pole once a day. The Moon glows from its own light, while eclipses are caused by some dark, unknown object getting in front of the various celestial bodies.

Of course, this theory leads to many problems. If the Earth is flat with the North Pole at the center, the southern continents would have to be much further apart than mariners had already proven them to be. Also, why don't the heavenly bodies fall to Earth? Why does the Moon have phases if it makes its own light? Why isn't the Sun visible from all points of the Earth at all times? How does it act as a spotlight?

Rowbotham tried to explain these anomalies through less than satisfactory means. For the visibility of the Sun, which he envisioned as moving around the North Pole, he asserted:

> "The question, 'how is it that the earth is not at all times illuminated all over its surface, seeing that the sun is always several hundred miles above it?' may be answered as follows:--
>
> "First, if no atmosphere existed, no doubt the light of the sun would diffuse over the whole earth at once, and alternations of light and darkness could not exist.
>
> "Secondly, as the earth is covered with an atmosphere of many miles in depth, the density of which gradually increases downwards to the surface, all the rays of light except those which are vertical, as they enter the upper stratum of air are arrested in their course of diffusion, and by refraction bent downwards towards the earth; as this takes place in all directions round the sun--equally where density and other conditions are equal, and vice versa--the effect is a comparatively distinct disc of sun-light."

As for sunrise and sunset, Rowbotham offered the following explanation:

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> “Although the sun is at all times above the earth’s surface, it appears in the morning to ascend from the north-east to the noonday position, and thence to descend and disappear, or set, in the north-west. This phenomenon arises from the operation of a simple and everywhere visible law of perspective. A flock of birds, when passing over a flat or marshy country, always appears to descend is it recedes; and if the flock is extensive, the first bird appears lower or nearer to the horizon than the last, although they are at the same actual altitude above the earth immediately beneath them. When a balloon sails away from an observer, without increasing or decreasing its altitude, it appears to gradually approach the horizon. In a long row of lamps, the second--supposing the observer to stand at the beginning of the series---will appear lower than the first; the third lower than the second; and so on to the end of the row; the farthest away always appearing the lowest, although each one has the same altitude; and if such a straight line of lamps could be continued far enough, the lights would at length descend, apparently, to the horizon, or to a level with the eye of the observer …
>
> “Bearing in mind the above phenomena it will easily be seen how the sun, although always above and parallel to the earth’s surface, must appear to ascend from the morning horizon to the noonday or meridian position; and thence to descend to the evening horizon.”

Then there is his explanation for the commonly seen phenomenon familiar to mariners since early times: a ship’s hull will disappear before its masts do. This question had embarrassed him before, but now he had an answer, claiming:

> “To argue, for instance, that because the lower part of an outward-bound vessel disappears before the mast-head, the water must be round, is to assume that a round surface only can produce such an effect. But if it can be shown that a simple law of perspective in connection with a plane surface necessarily produces this appearance, the assumption of rotundity is not required, and all the misleading fallacies and confusion involved in or mixed up with it may be avoided.

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> “Any distinctive part of a body will become invisible before the whole or any larger part of the same body, is sufficiently demonstrated. It will therefore be readily seen that the hull of a receding ship obeying the same law must disappear on a plane surface, before the mast head. If it is put in the form of a syllogism the conclusion is inevitable:--
>
> “The hull is a distinctive part of a ship.
>
> “ *Ergo* , the hull of a receding or outward bound ship must disappear before the whole, inclusive of the mast head.
>
> “To give the argument a more practical and nautical character it may be stated as follows:
>
> “That part of any receding body which is nearest to the surface upon which it moves, contracts, and becomes in-visible before the parts which are further away from such surface …
>
> “The hull of a ship is nearer to the water--the surface on which it moves--than the mast head.
>
> “ *Ergo* , the hull of an outward bound ship must be the first to disappear.”

This statement, while on the surface sounding reasonable and logical, is demonstrably false. Indeed, once any thought is given to it, the answer is patently ridiculous.

The rest of the book goes on in a similar vein, and despite the shoddy reasoning, Rowbotham’s theories were hugely influential in alternative religious and pseudoscientific circles. If anything, he may be justly called the founder of the modern Flat Earth movement. His Zetetic Society even opened a chapter in New York, and Rowbotham shipped a thousand copies of his book there to distribute to Americans.

Rowbotham’s work helped lead to the adoption of Flat Earth beliefs by the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church. Founded in 1896 by John Alexander Dowie (1847-1907), a Scottish faith healer, this church rejected modern medicine and also prohibited alcohol, pork, short skirts, and whistling on Sundays. The church did well, and Dowie eventually founded

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the town of Zion in Illinois for his followers. Zion quickly grew to a population of 6,000, and Dowie took to wearing elaborate robes and calling himself “Elijah the Restorer.” Many in the town worked at Zion Industries, making products ranging from fruit bars to Scottish lace, and Dowie personally spent much of the money. In fact, he spent so much that the church teetered on bankruptcy, and in 1906 his followers ejected him in favor of Wilbur Glenn Voliva (1870-1942).

Dowie

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Voliva

Voliva was the one who introduced the idea of the Flat Earth into the church's doctrine. The church's schools taught that the Earth was flat, and authorities went so far that globes were banned within city limits.

Despite his odd beliefs, Voliva was a shrewd businessman, and he got the church back on a good financial footing. In 1923, the church opened a radio station, WCBD, and Voliva became the first preacher with his own station. Soon, all of North America and even parts of Central America were treated to lectures on the evils of astronomy, evolution, and science in general.

Voliva was a Bible literalist, mixing his narrow interpretations with a fair amount of humor. In one instance, he said, "The idea of a sun millions of miles in diameter and 91,000,000 miles away is silly. The sun is only 32 miles across and not more than 3,000 miles from the earth. It stands to reason it must be so. God made the sun to light the earth, and therefore must have placed it close to the task it was designed to do. What would you think

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of a man who built a house in Zion and put the lamp to light it in Kenosha, Wisconsin?”

His theory was a pretty standard Flat Earth model, with a few added religious touches. According to Voliva, Earth was a disk centered on the North Pole and ringed with a barrier of ice that people have mistaken for Antarctica. Beyond the ice barrier lay Hell, and beneath it was a region inhabited by the ghosts of a race that lived on Earth before Adam and Eve. The sky was a dome with stars fixed in it, and the Sun and Moon were both luminous and far smaller than the astronomers (whom Voliva called “poor, ignorant, conceited fools”) said they were.

Night after night, Voliva would sit before the microphone in his personal radio station and rail against the scientific establishment, claiming he could “whip to smithereens any man in the world in a mental battle; I have never met any professor who knew a millionth as much on any subject as I do.” Listeners across the continent must have been equally amazed and amused.

Like many preachers before and since, Voliva also predicted the end of the world. He first predicted the world would end in 1923, and when that didn’t happen, he adjusted the date to 1927, then 1930, then 1934, and finally 1935. As for himself, he promised he would live past the final day – in fact, he claimed he would live to 120 thanks to his strict diet which, mostly consisted of buttermilk and Brazil nuts. He would fall about 50 years short, dying in 1942 at the age of 72.

Like many preachers, including his own predecessor, Voliva began to amass a large personal fortune at the expense of his church, and both he and the church ended up bankrupt. Remarkably, the church survived and still exists today, but it has dispensed with the Flat Earth theory and is now more of a mainstream fundamentalist church.

One might think that after Rowbotham died in 1884, his self-created field of Zetetic Astronomy would die with him, but he had loyal followers who continued his teachings. The most important was Lady Elizabeth Anne Blount, who founded the Universal Zetetic Society with the purpose of spreading “knowledge related to Natural Cosmogony in confirmation of the Holy Scriptures, based on practical scientific investigation.” In other words, the scientific investigation served to prove what the investigators had

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already decided was true, the exact opposite of how real science works. The society's magazine was called *The Earth Not a Globe Review* and was published for several years. Lady Blount also published *Earth: A Monthly Magazine of Sense and Science* from 1901-1904.

Lady Blount

The Earth Not a Globe Review was a strange mix of polemic, long-winded essays, letters to the editor, and criticisms of science reporting in the mainstream press and science education in schools. One article in the May 1896 issue titled "Faith and Science" stated that "we intend to show the utter falsity and unscientific character of the theories of modern astronomy, geology, and evolution; and that they are one and all, not only anti-scriptural, but irrational and unphilosophical. We challenge the ablest scientists of the day to defend their *suppositions* , and their theories built thereon, or to find a single flaw in the Divine Cosmogony of Holy Writ."

The article challenged a Christian magazine titled *The Faith* , in which an article tried to reconcile evolution with the Biblical account of creation by saying that creation was actually a "series of processes." *The Earth Not a Globe Review* countered, "We reply, not *necessarily* so. The 'Divine

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purpose referred to in the Scriptures' knows no 'series of processes', but distinctly and absolutely teaches creation to have been instantaneous. The point that divides error from truth is an exceedingly fine one, and this assertion about a 'series of processes,' is the first step from the Scriptures of Truth on the road of error and falsehood."

The article goes on to state that there is no evidence for evolution in the past or present, and that since Adam was the first man, there is no place in Biblical truth for a "pre-Adamic man." It ends with a ditty:

"There was an ape in the days that were earlier;

Centuries passed, and his hair became curlier;

Centuries more gave a thumb to his wrist,

THEN, he was a man, an Evolutionist."

Another important devotee of Rowbotham was William Carpenter (1830-1896), an English printer and stenographer. Carpenter helped Rowbotham produce many of his books and pamphlets, and in 1879, he moved to Baltimore and became one of Rowbotham's main advocates in the United States. He also took on a host of other causes thought eccentric in his day, such as vegetarianism, hypnotism, and spiritualism. Under the pen name "Common Sense," he wrote many pamphlets on these and other subjects, including two books on the Flat Earth: *Theoretical Astronomy Examined and Exposed: Proving the Earth not a Globe* (1864) and *A Hundred Proofs the Earth is not a Globe* (1885).

These hundred proofs include the following:

> "8. If the Earth were a globe, a small model globe would be the very best—because the truest—thing for the navigator to take to sea with him. But such a thing as that is not known: with such a toy as a guide, the mariner would wreck his ship, of a certainty! This is a proof that Earth is not a globe."
>
> "15. The idea that, instead of sailing horizontally round the Earth, ships are taken down one side of a globe, then underneath, and are brought up on the other side to get home again, is, except as a mere dream, impossible and absurd! And, since there are

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neither impossibilities nor absurdities in the simple matter of circumnavigation, it stands without argument, a proof that the Earth is not a globe."

"17. Human beings require a surface on which to live that, in its general character, shall be LEVEL; and since the Omniscient Creator must have been perfectly acquainted with the requirements of His creatures, it follows that, being an All-wise Creator, He has met them thoroughly. This is a theological proof that the Earth is not a globe."

"62. It is commonly asserted that 'the Earth must be a globe because people have sailed round it.' Now, since this implies that we can sail round nothing unless it be a globe, and the fact is well known that we can sail round the Earth as a plane, the assertion is ridiculous, and we have another proof that Earth is not a globe."

"72. Astronomers tell us that, in consequence of the Earth's 'rotundity,' the perpendicular walls of buildings are, nowhere, parallel, and that even the walls of houses on opposite sides of a street are not! But, since all observation fails to find any evidence of this want of parallelism which theory demands, the idea must be renounced as being absurd and in opposition to all well-known facts. This is a proof that the Earth is not a globe."

John Cleves Symmes, Jr.

While Halley's theories were widely read, the founder of the modern theory of the Hollow Earth was the American army officer and businessman John Cleves Symmes Jr. (1780-1829). Symmes fought with distinction in the War of 1812, and after his discharge in 1815, he moved to St. Louis, then a small frontier town, and traded for furs with the Fox tribe. It was there on April 10, 1818 that Symmes published his *Circular No. 1* , the first public declaration of his odd beliefs. It stated:

"TO ALL THE WORLD!

"I declare the earth is hollow, and habitable within; containing a number of solid concentrick spheres, one within the other, and that it is open at the poles 12 or 16 degrees; I pledge my life in

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support of this truth, and am ready to explore the hollow, if the world will support and aid me in the undertaking.

"(signed) Jno. Cleves Symmes. Of Ohio, Late Captain of Infantry.

"N. B.—I have ready for the press, a Treatise on the principles of matter, wherein I show proofs of the above positions, account for various phenomena, and disclose *Doctor Darwin's Golden Secret* .

"My terms are the patronage of this and the new worlds.

"I dedicate to my Wife and her ten Children.

"I select *Doctor S. L. Mitchell* , *Sir H. Davy* , and *Baron Alex. de Humboldt* , as my protectors.

"I ask one hundred brave companions, well equipped, to start from Siberia in the fall season, with Reindeer and slays, on the ice of the frozen sea; I engage we find a warm and rich land, stocked with thrifty vegetables and animals if not men, on reaching one degree northward of latitude 82; we will return in the succeeding spring.

"J.C.S."

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Symmes

Symmes printed 500 copies and sent them to “each notable foreign government, reigning prince, legislature, city, college, and philosophical societies, throughout the union, and to individual members of our National Legislature.” The year after making his remarkable statement, Symmes moved with his family to Newport, Kentucky. His fur trading business had not been a successful one, and it would be the first of many financial setbacks in his life.

These setbacks were in no small part due to his odd ideas. His circular garnered a lot of attention, but not of the positive sort. It provoked a huge amount of negativity in the press and was republished for years afterwards any time an editor faced a slow news day and wanted to give his readers a chuckle. It also didn’t help that he attached to his circular a certificate attesting that he was of sound mind, which only encouraged the people who thought he was nuts.

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His “protectors” were three notable scientists, nominated as such without their prior knowledge or consent, and of these, only Dr. Samuel Mitchell gave him any encouragement, writing to various papers that he would be interested in speaking with Symmes after he returned from the inner worlds. Neither he nor anyone else helped fund the proposed expedition.

Nonetheless, Symmes would not be stopped. He started a massive letter writing campaign to the press and to scientists and soon went on the lecture circuit, speaking to anyone who would listen about his model of a concentric earth. He was a hesitant speaker, stammering and speaking in an annoying, nasal tone, but he persevered. His ideas sounded similar to those of Edmond Halley in that there are a series of hollow concentric spheres that have air and illumination. In Symmes’ model, there are five concentric spheres, habitable on both the concave and convex surfaces, thus creating 10 potential worlds. The largest sphere, the one on which people today live, is about 1,000 miles thick, with four more spheres of smaller size within. These can be accessed through large openings at the poles. The one in the Arctic measures about 4,000 miles across, while the Antarctic hole is 6,000 miles in diameter.

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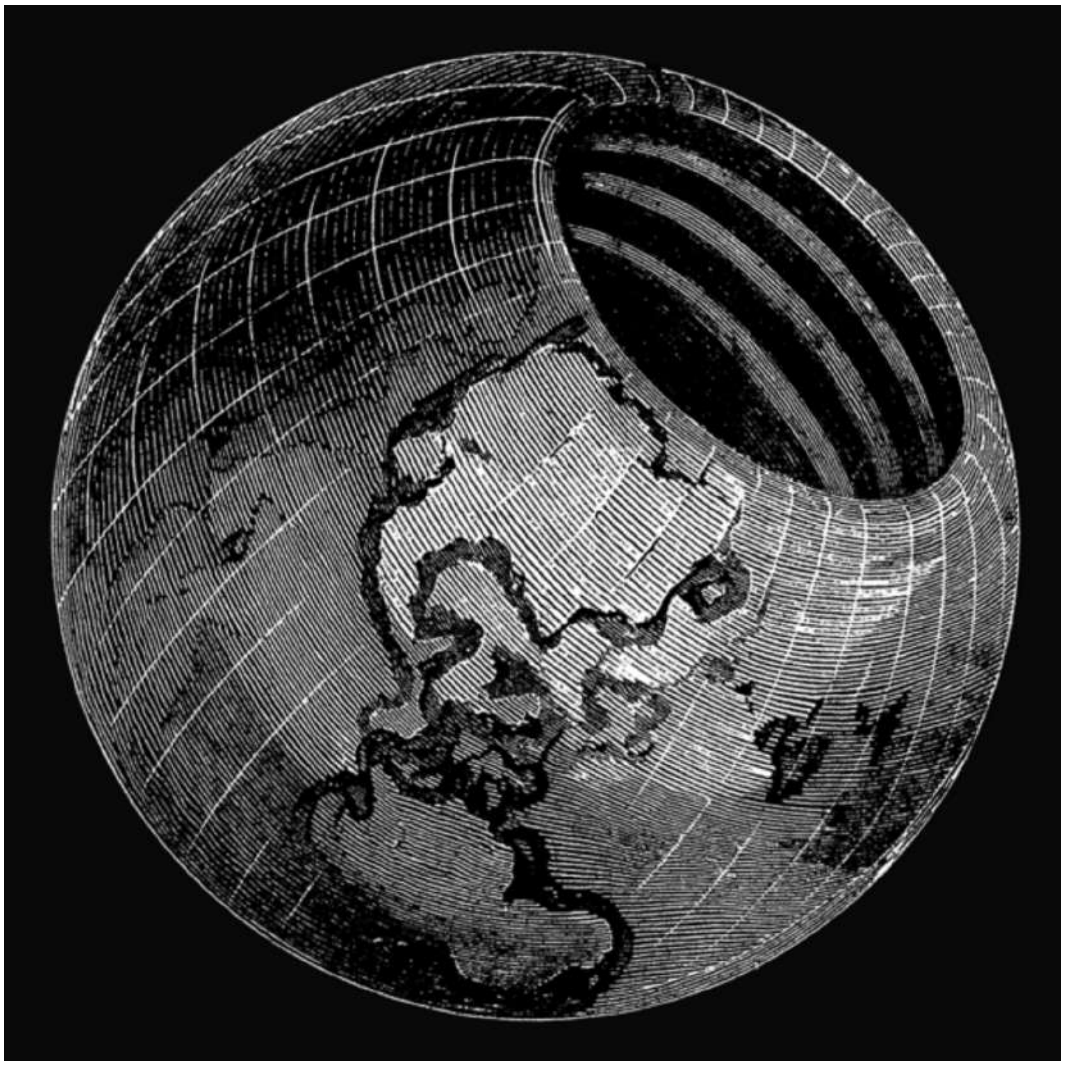

An illustration of Symmes' theory

Symmes explained that within each shell was a life force. "Each sphere has a cavity, or mid-plane space near the centre of the matter composing it, filled with a very light, subtle, elastic substance…The gas escaping from these spaces is, no doubt, the cause of earthquakes; and supply the numerous volcanoes…This aerial fluid with which the mid-plane spaces are filled, may possibly be adapted to the support of animal life; and the interior surfaces of the spheres formed by them, may abound with animals, with organs only adapted to the medium which they are destined to inhabit."

Symmes believed that it would be a simple enough task to gain access to the inner worlds. The centrifugal force from the Earth's rotation flattened the polar regions and made the rims of the holes a slope so gradual that

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explorers could enter the inner face of the earth's outer crust without even knowing they had done so.

How he came to these conclusions is a bit unclear, but his idea of holes in the poles is one that has endured to the present day, remaining a key component of the various Hollow Earth theories. In fact, many Hollow Earth theorists honor their founding father by calling them "Symmes Holes."

An illustration depicting a Symmes Hole

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A map or plan showing where it is most probable the verge of the N. polar opening exists; compiled and adjusted from many protracted partial marks in both maps, on the 27th day of May 1822
AMERICA
ASIA
EMPIRE
Greenland
Iceland
Hotes:—The dotted circle is in lieu of a scribed circle at the 70th degree to shew centre & proportions
The oval like line is for the verge most distant (apparent) by astronomical data, but such as terrestrial facts indicate

Symmes' own drawing of the North Pole

Like Halley before him, Symmes felt the spheres rotated at different rates and on different axes, which explained the variation in compass readings. He also believed that the large holes at the poles would allow sunlight to filter into the inner spheres, which had polar holes of their own. He even went beyond Halley by proposing that all planets and meteors, and even the sun, were made up of concentric spheres. Symmes gradually evolved his ideas and eventually discarded the concentric earth model for one single hollow sphere—the main Hollow Earth model that is still believed in today.

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Symmes died in 1829 without ever having seen his theories widely accepted, and without ever getting enough funds for his proposed expedition. He also never wrote that book he had promised in his first circular. Instead, he left a mountain of debt for his family to handle. He did, however, make a few converts in his time. One was author and politician James McBride of Ohio, who wrote extensively about the state's antiquities, particularly about the many prehistoric mounds that were built in geometric and animal shapes. In 1826, McBride wrote *Symmes's Theory of Concentric Spheres: Demonstrating That the Earth is Hollow, Habitable Within, and Widely Open About the Poles* . The publication of such a work by a respected antiquarian provided some much-needed help to Symmes' poor reputation. The following year, explorer and author Jeremiah N. Reynolds published *Remarks of Symmes' Theory Which Appeared in the American Quarterly Review* . He joined Symmes on the lecture circuit for a time, although later in life he distanced himself from the Hollow Earth theory.

McBride

The main work for Symmes scholars remains that written by his devoted son Americus in 1878. Plagiarizing McBride's text once McBride was dead and couldn't defend himself, he added some of Symmes' lecture notes and

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papers to produce *Symmes's Theory of Concentric Spheres: Demonstrating That the Earth is Hollow, Habitable Within, and Widely Open About the Poles, Compiled by Americus Symmes, from the Writings of his Father, Capt. John Cleves Symmes* in 1878. As the name indicates, Americus Symmes even stole McBride's title, but despite this cribbing, it remains the most interesting book on Symmes's work because it was written by his son, who was raised on the theory of the Hollow Earth and who championed it for the rest of his life.

Americus Symmes used the text to provide a clear description of his father's theories, although at times he achieved the opposite. For example, when he described the hole at the North Pole, he wrote, "The diameter of the northern opening is about two thousand miles, or four thousand miles from outside to outside." Does he mean the radius is two thousand miles, making the diameter four thousand? He went on to assert, "The south opening is somewhat larger. The planes of these openings are parallel to each other, but form an angle of 12° with the equator, so that the highest part of the north plane is directly opposite the lowest part of the south plane." Nowhere does he discuss how his father knew all this, and at that point in history, no explorer had made it to either pole. In fact, people still debated whether the poles were frozen, open ocean, or if there was land on them.

Interestingly, Americus did write that the beginning of the northern verge, or lip, that leads gradually to the Inner Earth, "begins at a point in Lapland about 68° N. and 200 E. from London on a meridian traversing Spitzbergen, whence it passes southwest across the Atlantic Ocean and the southern part of Greenland, through Hudson's Bay and over the continent to the Pacific near Cook's Inlet, thence across the Fox Islands to a point about 56° N. and 1600 W., nearly south of Behring's Straits. Then it passes over the Pacific, crossing the south part of Kamtchatka, continuing northwest through Siberia, entering Europe across the Ural Mountains, in latitude about 58° N., and passing near the Arctic coast, over the mouth of the White Sea, to the point of starting." Symmes claimed to have traced the edge of the northern verge by a careful examination of "many isolated facts from his own researches, and from the accounts of Ross, Howe, Parry, McKenzie, and others who had by sea and land explored the polar regions, while

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similar proofs have been drawn from later explorations since the promulgation of the theory in 1829."

While none of these explorers proposed a Hollow Earth—or indeed saw any evidence for one—Symmes noted some of the strange events they witnessed and used them to prove his theory. For example, "There is a remarkable difference of climate under different meridians upon the same parallel of latitude. It is known that the climate of the eastern coast of North America is much colder than that of Western Europe in the same latitude. The notion that this diversity is produced by the proximity of the ocean or of ranges of mountains is unsatisfactory; for countries, similar in these respects, in the same latitude, have a great diversity of climate. A theory which would explain the mild climate of France and England from these causes would not suit the case of New York and New England and the cold regions around the Gulf of St. Lawrence south of 59° north latitude. The topography of these sections of country is similar; and yet England and France have a mild and genial climate, while New England and Newfoundland are cold and bleak in the winter. Labrador, not so far north as Great Britain, is as cold and bleak as countries in Europe 20° farther north. The heat and cold of the different climates are governed by their distance from the verge of the polar opening, and do not depend on their nearness to or remoteness from the equator…The region of the verges must be the coldest parts of the earth's surface, because, being more convex, they diverge instead of converging the sun's rays. The temperature, therefore, of any given part of the earth's surface depends as well upon its proximity to the verge as to the equator."

Symmes also attempted to explain another strange phenomena noted by Arctic explorers: "Captain Ross states that in high latitudes there are remarkable changes in the apparent extent of the sensible horizon. From north to south the horizon is so limited that objects can be seen only at very short distances, while in a direction east or west the horizon is greatly extended, and objects can be seen at an immense distance, as if upon a horizontal plane. The direction north and south is directly over the convex surface of the verge, where the horizon is extremely limited; while along the surface of the verge east and west the view is along upon the plane of the verge, and the horizon is greatly extended. This is precisely what would result from the existence of such a verge. The slight depression of the

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surface of the earth around the poles is wholly insufficient to produce this effect, which accords so well with this theory."

The book also noted why Symmes felt that all the bodies of the solar system were made up of concentric spheres. "The appearance of Saturn, we conceive, establishes the fact, that the principle of concentric spheres, or hollow planets, does exist, at least in one instance, in the solar system. And if the fact be established that it exists in one case, is it not fair, nay, is it not almost a certain and necessary consequence, that the same laws of matter which formed one planet into concentric spheres, must form all the others on a plan more or less the same? If we draw any conclusion, or form any opinion at all, respecting the formation of the planets, whose inner parts we can not see, or if we form any opinion in relation to our own planet in particular, whose poles have never been explored, would not reasoning from analogy bring us to the conclusion, that all bodies of matter are formed similar to that of Saturn, unless we have positive proof to the contrary? But it is not in Saturn alone that we find proof of the principles contended for by Captain Symmes. Most, if not all of the other planets, belonging to our system, whose relative situation afford us an opportunity of observation, appear to exhibit strong proofs that the same principles prevail throughout. The planet Mars exhibits concentric circles round one or the other of his poles, according as either is more or less in opposition to us. These circles appear alternately light and dark, exactly as they should, supposing the planet to be constituted of concentric spheres (such as Symmes believes of the earth), the light being reflected from their verges on which it falls; and in which case the vacant space between the spheres would necessarily appear dark. Sometimes he appears to us with a single ring at each pole. At such times his axis is at right angles, or nearly so, with a line drawn from the earth to his center. This, we conceive, can be accounted for by the great refraction occasioned by the increased density of his atmosphere around the poles, which appears to throw out the further sides of the verges so as to make them appear like rings, in the form they present themselves to our view. That such is the natural appearance may be evidenced by taking a small wooden sphere with open poles, and immerse it in a circular glass vessel filled with water; when viewed horizontally through the side of the glass, with the plane of the openings at a right angle with the visual ray, the refraction occasioned by the water, answering to the dense atmosphere of Mars, will apparently throw out the polar openings,

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and present you with a view, similar to the appearance of Mars, when his axis is at right angles to us…'Dr. Herschel has observed a faint illumination in the unlighted part of the planet Venus, which he ascribes to some phosphoric quality of its atmosphere.' Editor's note to *Adams' Philosophy* , vol. 4, p. 204, Philadelphia, 1807. Query—Might not such an appearance be accounted for as rationally, by supposing the rays of the sun to shine or be reflected through one of her polar openings, and to fall on the verge of the sphere at the opposite polar opening?"

Symmes even asserted that the sun was made up of concentric spheres. In this telling, sunspots were fractures in the outer sphere offering a view of a darker sphere within. People cannot see the holes at the solar poles because the sun is so much larger that nobody on Earth could get the right angle.

The book also included this touching note about his father: "Captain Symmes was a man of great simplicity and earnestness of character, a high-minded, honorable, honest, and exemplary man in every walk of life, and was beloved, trusted, and respected by all who knew him. So fixed in his mind was the belief of the truth of his theory, that for ten years, although laboring under great pecuniary embarrassments, and buffeted by the ridicule and sarcasm of an opposing world, he persevered in his endeavors to interest others in it, so as to enable him to test its truth by a polar expedition, but without success."

The Theory Develops

While Symmes endured much ridicule in his lifetime, the theory he championed was, thanks to his efforts, now firmly lodged in the public imagination. Many took Symmes' ideas and expanded them, often without mentioning Symmes at all. One such imitator was "Professor" W.F. Lyons, who published *The Hollow Globe: The World's Agitator and Reconciler* in 1871. In it he used Symmes' later idea of a hollow world rather than concentric spheres. Indeed, it was the simpler Hollow Earth model that endured in later generations, not the earlier, more complex model first posited by Edmond Halley and John Symmes Jr.

In 1885, William F. Warren published *Paradise Found* , which placed the Garden of Eden at the poles. While he didn't propose a Hollow Earth, he did see the poles as being habitable and the source of all civilization, an

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idea taken up by many later Hollow Earth theorists. Around the same time, popular literature during the Victorian Age saw a rise in imaginative tales of science—what Hugo Gernsback would later call “science fiction” when he founded the first magazine dedicated to the genre, *Amazing Stories* , in 1926. Writers soon latched onto the idea of a Hollow Earth as a setting for interesting adventures, full of lost civilizations, dinosaurs, and unknown lands.

Among the Gnomes: An Occult Tale of Adventure in the Untersberg , written by T. Fisher Unwin and published in the December 7, 1895 issue of the widely read English periodical *Spectator* , tells of an Irishman who visits a Hollow Earth inhabited by gnomes, dragons, and other beasts of folklore. It was republished several times and may have influenced Richard Shaver and his popular writings (discussed further below).

The following year, John Uri Lloyd threw Freemasons into the mix in his novel *Editorpha* (Aphrodite spelled backwards). In this story, a Freemason wishes to be initiated into the mysteries of the world and is led into the Inner Earth by a faceless guardian who speaks to him via mental telepathy. This story includes a central sun that illuminates the earth’s interior—a key element of many Hollow Earth models.

The Hollow Earth was also a good place to project an author’s political and social ideas. One of the first to do this was “Mrs. J. Wood” in the 1882 novel *Pantaletta* . The inner world in this story is run by arrogant, domineering women who have gone to great lengths to eradicate sexism, even to changing personal pronouns. Given the anti-feminist stance, the author was likely a man using a female nom de plume. *Mizora* by “Vera Zarovitch,” perhaps a pen name for Mary E. Bradley Lane, takes a more positive, if radical, spin on feminism by envisioning a race of blonde superwomen who have eradicated brunettes and men in order to rid their society of crime. Their children are born via parthenogenesis.

Mizora isn’t the only fictional Hollow Earth used as a place for the author’s personal utopia, whether it be socialism, technocracy, anarchism, or even nudism. More often, however, the world inside the planet is simply an exotic locale for adventure. The bestselling author Edgar Rice Burroughs, most famous for his character Tarzan, wrote a series of swashbuckling novels, starting with *At the Earth’s Core* in 1914, that take

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place in a Hollow Earth. Similarly, *The Moon Maid* (1923) takes place in a hollow moon.

Burroughs

All the while, more “nonfiction” books came out espousing the theory. One important book was *Phantom of the Poles* , which appeared in 1906. Its author, William Reed, compiled all the strange sightings and unexplained phenomena that polar explorers had encountered, mixed them with Symmes’ theories, and tried to prove the Hollow Earth theory. He noted things such as icebergs having pollen or seeds on them and sightings of birds or other animals in the far north, and subsequently claimed these were proof of a hidden garden paradise inside the holes at the poles. Reed went on to write that the crust of the Earth measured 800 miles in thickness and that the empty space inside was 6,400 miles in diameter. He claimed, “The Earth is hollow. The Poles, so long sought, are phantoms. There are openings at the northern and southern extremities. In the interior are vast continents, oceans, mountains and rivers. Vegetable and animal life are evident in this New World, and it is probably peopled by races unknown to dwellers on the Earth’s surface.”

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Like his predecessors, Reed proclaimed that the Hollow Earth model explained all the questions scientists had about magnetic irregularities, weather, and animal migration. “By treating the earth as hollow, we have the solution of all the great mysteries. . .the supernatural giving way to the natural, as it always does with understanding, and relief comes to mind and body.”

William Gardner went even further by adding a sun inside the Hollow Earth, so that the inhabitants living on the inside surface of the crust could enjoy direct sunlight rather than make do with whatever filtered in from the polar holes. In his 1913 work *A Journey to the Earth’s Interior* , subtitled *Or Have the Poles Really Been Discovered?* , Gardner claimed the inner sun measured 600 miles across. Since the sun was so close to the inner surface, only some 2,900 miles, the interior was lush tropics. Gardner imagined it to be paradise and spent years trying to collect funds for an expedition there, to no success. He prophesized, “We shall see all when we explore the Arctic in earnest, as we shall easily be able to do with the aid of airships. And when once we have seen it we shall wonder why it was for so long we were blind to evidence which, as is shown in this book, has been before men’s eyes for practically a whole century and over.”

Of course, it wouldn’t take many decades before “airships” really did fly over the poles, during which no holes were found.

Concave Earth Theories

As Hollow Earth publications continued to come out at a steady trickle, the theories became more elaborate. The one inner sun became two, and they got the names Pluto and Persephone. The inner civilizations that no one had seen but everyone decided must exist were described in intimate detail. Writers seemed to compete with one another in ever more elaborate models and “secret” information.

It wasn’t long after Symmes made his startling hypothesis known to the public that an even stranger theory began circulating. According to this theory, not only is the Earth a hollow shell, but everyone is living on the inside of it. This became known as the “concave earth theory,” in which we are on the inner, concave surface, as opposed to the rather staid and boring “convex earth theory” that we are living on the outside, convex surface of a

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hollow planet. This theory was first propounded by the eccentric 19th century American doctor Cyrus Reed Teed. It seems Teed was one of those intelligent yet credulous individuals who would back any strange belief if it appealed to him. He dabbled in quack medicine and alchemy, and he tinkered with experiments in electricity. It was during one of these experiments in 1869 that he had his first vision. Something went wrong with Teed's apparatus, and it gave him a strong shock that knocked him out. While lying on the floor unconscious, Teed had a vision of a beautiful woman who told him he was the messiah and that he must redeem humanity.

Teed

After Teed recovered, he was a changed man. He decided to combine his faith with his wide yet quirky scientific knowledge to bring the truth to the world. He changed his name to Koresh, the Hebrew version of the name of the Persian king Cyrus the Great. Teed got this from Isaiah 44:28: "I say of

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Koresh, ‘He is my shepherd, he will do everything I want. He will say of Jerusalem, ‘You will be rebuilt,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’”

In time, the eccentric doctor started preaching a doctrine he called Koreshanity, a mixture of utopian Christianity and pseudoscience. He advocated celibacy, communal living, and, for his true followers, he promised immortality on Earth. The teaching he is most famous for—and the one that got him the most ridicule in the press—was the doctrine of Cellular Cosmogony, a weird twist on the old Hollow Earth theory. Not content with living on top of a hollow sphere with all sorts of wondrous secrets hidden inside, Koresh flipped the idea. In his 1905 book *Cellular Cosmogony* , Koresh wrote, “The sun is an invisible electromagnetic battery revolving in the universe’s center on a 24-year cycle. Our visible sun is only a reflection, as is the moon, with the stars reflecting off seven mercurial discs that float in the sphere’s center. Inside the earth there are three separate atmospheres: the first composed of oxygen and nitrogen and closest to the earth; the second, a hydrogen atmosphere above it; the third, an aboron atmosphere at the center. [NOTE: “Aboron” doesn’t exist; perhaps Koresh meant the element boron?] The earth’s shell is one hundred miles thick and has seventeen layers. The outer seven are metallic with a gold rind on the outermost layer, the middle five are mineral and the five inward are geologic strata. Inside the shell there is life, outside a void.”

In other words, Teed claimed everyone lives on the inside of the sphere that contains the entire universe. The heavenly bodies, such as stars, planets, and comets don’t actually exist but are simply remnants of light curving in the atmosphere. Also, the sun is half bright and half dark and rotates at the center of the Hollow Earth, giving night to one half of the interior shell and day to the other.

As strange as these ideas may sound, they attracted a sizeable group of devoted followers. Koresh was a charismatic speaker and devoted to his cause, so people naturally gravitated to him. He founded an organization called the Koreshan Unity in the 1870s in New York and Chicago. In 1888, his followers formed their first commune in Chicago.

But Koresh had bigger plans. He had calculated that the “vitellus of the great cosmogonic egg” (a.k.a. the bellybutton of the Hollow Earth) lay near

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Fort Meyers, Florida. This spot would witness the Second Coming of Christ, and it was here that he decided to build his New Jerusalem. In 1894, the Koreshan Unity bought 320 acres of land on the Estero River. A small core of devoted followers worked hard to build up the site, constructing homes and manufacturing facilities to make themselves economically self-sufficient. Koresh proved to be a sharp business leader as well as preacher, and the town quickly prospered and grew. Soon it was exporting products as diverse at mattresses and hats and generating its own electricity, part of which it sold to surrounding communities.

By the first decade of the 20th century, Koresh had built up a national organization of more than 4,000 followers, and his New Jerusalem, population 250, proved an economic success. It had been officially incorporated into a town and had expanded to encompass 110 square miles, making it the fifth largest city by area in the United States.

Not everyone in Florida appreciated the strange cult, however, because Koresh's teaching went against traditional Christian theology. The press made fun of his pseudoscience and called Koresh a charlatan who used religion to make money. In a bid to prove he was right, Koresh brought in the eminent Professor Ulysses Grant Morrow to prove his theories. At least, Koresh thought he was eminent; Grant was a professor at the Koreshan College of Life, after all.

Morrow launched the Koreshan Geodetic Survey to study the true shape of the earth and built a complex machine called the Rectilineator in order to measure the curvature of the planet. Like so many pseudoscientists, Morrow made the fatal flaw of deciding on the result of the experiment before actually running it. His Rectilineator wasn't to determine whether people lived on a globe or the inside of a hollow sphere, but to prove the latter. This was God's word and therefore must be true. Koresh repeatedly stated, "To know of the Earth's concavity and its relation to Universal form, is to know God; but to believe in the Earth's convexity, is to deny God."

What true scientist could deny such a statement? As a result, Morrow spent many long weeks setting up his Rectilineator, which consisted of ten large double T-squares, set in a row on individual mounts. He and his team calibrated them to project a horizontal line that would measure the curvature of the Earth. If the planet was concave and curved upwards at a

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rate of 8 inches per mile, as Koresh and God said, and if the experiment started four miles from the shoreline of the Gulf of Mexico, then at the end of four miles, this straight reference line would touch water.

The experiment started in January 1897 and required each T-square to be jumped along the line and calibrated. Since the whole contraption was only 12 feet long, it took five months of leapfrogging T-squares to come to the conclusion. On May 5, 1897, Koresh and “Professor” Morrow triumphantly declared that the experiment had been a success and that it had proved people live on the inside of a sphere.

The press and mainstream scientists either laughed at or ignored the experiment, and the community suffered more hostility than ever. The neighbors didn’t like having a city made up of this weird group in their midst, and they liked it even less when Koresh’s followers founded the Progressive Liberty Party and voted as a bloc to get their way in county politics. Soon local toughs started harassing Koresh’s believers, even going so far as beating them up. Koresh himself was seriously injured in one of these fights in 1904, when a man from Fort Meyers pistol-whipped him. His followers claimed this injury eventually led to his death on December 22, 1908.

Of course, that also came as a shock, because Koresh had always claimed to be immortal. The community kept the body for a few days, hoping their leader would come back to them, but eventually the county coroner took it and had it cremated. After that, the community began to decline, riven by internal power struggles and shrinking as people drifted away. The last members died in the 1960s, and now part of their old commune is Koreshan State Historic Site, where visitors can hike, fish, and see Koresh’s old home. Of course, if the Earth is on the inside of a hollow sphere, another way people can visit the Koreshan State Historic Site is to go to China and point a powerful telescope straight up.

Koresh wasn’t the last person to assert that people are living on the inside of a shell of a planet. Several German theorists wrote about the possibility, and in 1983, Egyptian mathematician Mostafa Abdelkader published an elaborate proof that we live on the inside of the shell but that Koresh was wrong in asserting that heavenly objects were mere light phantoms from the half-bright/half-dark sun. Actually, the entire universe as astronomers

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envision it is inverted within the hollow shell, getting progressively smaller the closer in toward the center an object is. As Abdelkader stated, “The enormous galaxies and other remote objects are mapped inside as microscopic objects, and our moon is by far the largest of the celestial objects, all of which revolve daily around the earth’s axis. Straight rays of light are mapped as arcs of circles, so that all celestial phenomena appear to inside observers in G just as they do to outside observers in C. We next consider the hypothesis that, conversely, our actual universe is this finite G.” Because of this shrinking of space at the center of the interior universe, light is absorbed as in a black hole. This is why we can’t see the daytime side of the interior shell at night.

According to Abdelkader, light bends rather than travels in a straight line, and this creates various optical illusions that explain why nobody can tell they’re on the inside of a sphere. For example, when astronauts stood on the moon, looked back at the Earth, and saw a sphere, what they saw in fact was the inside of the shell, of which the sight lines flared out, creating the illusion of a sphere. This is interesting because most Hollow Earth theorists have to become conspiracy theorists to explain the space program. They assert that NASA and all the world’s other space agencies are staying silent about the truth of the Hollow Earth, hiding evidence of the Symmes Holes for some unspecified reason.

Interestingly, many mainstream scientists, while believing that Abdelkader is wrong, say they cannot disprove his wild theories. If all mathematical and physical models of the universe are inverted, they reproduce exactly what we think we see. Thus, there is no way to tell if the universe is the way most scientists believe it is or inverted like Abdelkader suggests. In the end, one supposes, it doesn’t really matter, since everything works the way science would expect it to.

Nazi UFOs and Underground Bases

Nazi Germany has captured the imagination of conspiracy theorists ever since its rise in the 1930s. It seemed inexplicable to some that a nation defeated in World War I and suffering from hyperinflation and political chaos could turn itself around, become a superpower, and conquer most of Europe in the course of less than two decades. Countless stories cropped up

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to explain Hitler’s meteoric rise to power and his stunning military victories.

One persistent rumor is that he had help from the Inner Earth. It is said that Hitler sent an expedition to search for the polar hole in Antarctica. The Nazis supposedly built a base down near the opening and staffed it with a large number of scientists and SS soldiers. It is even rumored that Hitler escaped there in the final days of the war.

While there is no hard evidence for this claim, it is true that the Nazi movement was deeply involved in the occult. Many Nazi leaders, especially in the early years of the movement in the 1920s, had ties to the various esoteric groups that existed in Weimar Germany. Once the Nazis truly rose to power in 1933, pagan symbolism became rife at their rallies, with everything from Nordic runes being used on SS gear to party members going on marches dressed up as Norse gods and Valkyries. Many social historians of the Nazi era believe that the party was gradually trying to replace Christianity with a racist neopagan religion of their own devising.

One organization popular with Nazis in the early days of the 1920s, when the National Socialist Party was just one of a number of right-wing parties fighting the centrist government and the various Communist and socialist parties, was the shadowy Vril Society. The Vril Society got its start from a work of fiction—a strange novel by Edward Bulwer-Lytton titled *Vril: The Power of the Coming Race* . Published in 1871, it follows the adventures of an American who enters a hidden world beneath the Earth, where he meets an advanced race called the Vril-ya, descendants of the ancient Aryans. These people have harnessed the life force of the planet, called Vril, which is the source of infinite creative and destructive power. Bulwer-Lytton himself dabbled in the esoteric arts and no doubt used his novel as a parable for mystical enlightenment.

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Lytton

The Vril Society in Berlin took this one step further by claiming the novel to be fact. They practiced various rituals, meditation, and a form of yoga to try and contact the Vril-ya, hoping to develop their own ability to manipulate Vril. They thought that one day their efforts would transform the world and the inner beings would come to the surface and join forces with the initiates of the Vril Society.

Needless to say, such an attractive philosophy was lapped up by other nationalistic and racist secret societies in Weimar Germany. One of these was the Thule Society, founded in Munich in 1918, which espoused the doctrine of Aryanism and influenced many leaders in the nascent Nazi party. This society, which included in its membership such figures as Rudolf Hess, was on its surface a study group of Germanic history, but it had far darker purposes. They espoused the idea of Germanic racial superiority, a rabid anti-Semitism, and the belief that a Fuhrer would come

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to save the German race from the evils of democracy and socialism and lead it into a new Golden Age. The group grew rapidly through the 1920s and even had their own magazine and weekly newspaper. The swastika was its main symbol, and one of its salutes was “Sieg heil!” (“Hail victory!”).

It has long been rumored that Hitler himself was a member of the Thule Society, but there is no hard proof of this. A book came out in 1933 by the society grand master, Baron Rudolf von Sebottendorff, titled *Before Hitler Came* , asserting that the future leader of Germany got his start in the society and owed much of his ideology to that secret order. The book sold well and had a second edition in 1934, but then the Nazis put it on the banned list, seized all copies they could get their hands on, and the baron disappeared. His publisher claimed he was murdered. Hitler had already written his own creation myth and did not want to play second fiddle to a group of occultists, no matter how much he owed to them ideologically.

Regardless of whether Hitler was a member or not, the Thule Society had a great spiritual influence on early National Socialism. Its idea of a pure Aryan people under threat of extinction by race mixing was eagerly taken on by the Nazis, as well as the idea that the original ancient civilization was Aryan and that the Third Reich would see this civilization rise up once again.

The Thule Society eventually disbanded, and many of its leading members went on to important posts in Hitler’s Germany. These included Max Ammann, business manager of the Nazi party’s newspaper and publishing house; Hans Frank, governor general of Poland; Gottfried Feder, economic advisor; Karl Harrer, first chairman of the Nazi Party; Rudolf Hess, Hitler’s secretary and first adjutant; Ernst Röhm, leader of the SA; and many other lesser figures. All of these men came into power in no small part because of their interest in ancient civilizations and their belief in the power of Vril.

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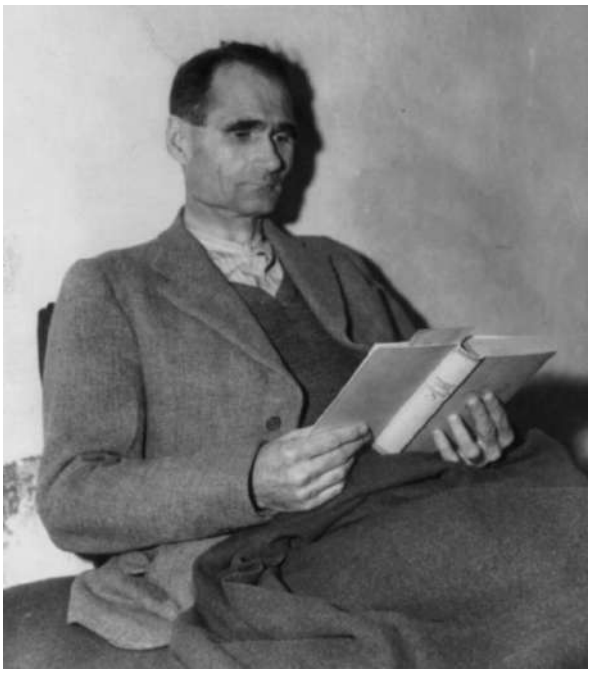

Hess

In their highly influential 1960 book, *The Morning of the Magicians* , researchers Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier wrote that the Vril Society constituted an inner circle of the most enlightened members of the Thule Society, and that the Third Reich actually built UFOs powered by Vril. Others claim that these UFOs are still with us, flying out of the Nazi Antarctic base and preparing for the Fourth Reich. Hitler is said to still be alive down there, kept alive by the power of Vril.

While these claims move well beyond the fantastic, there might be a kernel of truth in some of them. Interest in the theory of Earth being hollow might have led some high-ranking Nazis to seek out the Symmes Hole by visiting Antarctica. The Nazis came to power in 1933, and just five years later they sent an exploration team to the southern continent. The team claimed a swathe of coastline for the Third Reich and called it New Swabia. It included a long portion of coastline east of the Weddell Sea facing out on the southern Atlantic, along with a sizeable portion of territory inland. The claim was never recognized by other nations, and soon the world got swept up in World War II, leaving the claim mostly forgotten.

This was not the first German exploration of Antarctica. Like many other European nations, Germany had sent several expeditions there in the 19th

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century, as well as other locations around the globe. By the turn of the century, however, German exploration did begin to focus on the southern continent, and conspiracy theorists believe this was because the occult societies in Germany were already setting their sights on finding the hole to the Inner Earth.

The 1938-39 New Swabia expedition was kept a secret from the public, and the reasons given in government documents for the expedition were to create a whaling station (whale fat and whale oil being necessary for the future war effort) and scout possible locations for a naval base. Neither were ever built, because once the war started, Germany had its hands full and shelved any such ideas.

Or did they? Conspiracy theorists claim that the expedition made contact with a race of advanced beings in the Antarctic, who gave them the technology to build much of the German war machine, such as their advanced rocketry and even UFOs. The first reports of such a thing came during the war, when Allied bombers over Europe reported strange glowing balls of light chasing their planes. Dubbed “foo fighters,” they were taken seriously enough by the Allied High Command that the various air forces launched an investigation. One theory they came up with was that the foo fighters were some advanced new aircraft designed by Germany. Other theories included ball lightning, static from the wings interacting with ions in the air, and other natural phenomena. In the end, the foo fighters were never definitively explained, but since there were no reports of their attacking any aircraft, the various Allied air forces eventually dropped the investigation and focused on the more important matter of crushing the Third Reich.

Two years after the war, in 1947, pilot Kenneth Arnold had his famous encounter with a group of UFOs that he said flew like saucers skipping over the water. The press coined the term “flying saucers,” and a craze was born. Soon, strange objects were being reported all over the world, and several former German and Italian military officers—or at least people claiming to be such—gave interviews to the mainstream press saying the flying saucers looked very much like experimental aircraft they had worked on during the war. None of these claims could be fully verified, but a few saucer-like aircraft did get to at least the blueprint stage. Whether they could make the

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sudden jerky motions of the UFOs, so far beyond human aircraft of the time, is another matter.

Then came a landmark book, *German Secret Weapons of the Second World War* , which was published in Germany in 1957 and two years later in an English edition. This book was written by Rudolf Lusar, a former major in the German army. While he only devotes two pages to flying disks, he claims that they successfully flew. The design was a “wide-surface ring which rotated round a fixed, cupola-shaped cockpit. The ring consisted of adjustable wing-discs which could be brought into appropriate position for the take-off or horizontal flight, respectively. Miethe developed a discus-shaped plate of a diameter of 42m in which adjustable jets were inserted. Schriever and Habermohl, who worked in Prague, took off with the first ‘flying disc’ on February 14, 1945. Within three minutes they climbed to an altitude of 12,400m and reached a speed of 2,000 km/h in horizontal flight (!) It was intended ultimately to achieve speeds of 4,000 km/h.” Lusar didn’t explain how the pilots’ bodies could withstand such a massive acceleration.

Unfortunately for the flying saucer developers, these were the waning days of the war, and the Third Reich didn’t have access to the materials or money to perfect these craft. As the Soviet army advanced, the prototype was destroyed, but several of the scientists fell into Russian hands. Lusar says they started working for the Russians in a forced labor camp in Siberia, and that the 1950s wave of UFOs originated in the Soviet Union.

The story of Nazi UFOs and Antarctic bases has been growing ever since. It is even claimed that the Nazis built a base on the moon. Supposedly, many top Nazi officials fled to Antarctica. What is known is that in the spring and summer of 1945, after the war had ended, several German U-boats docked at various South American ports to give themselves up to neutral countries. These were the larger variety of U-boats, used during the war to transport people and equipment through the Allied blockade. What were they doing in the South Atlantic and Pacific, and why did they show up in South America with empty cargo holds? Most historians accept that they brought fleeing Nazis and their families to secret drop off points in South America and then surrendered at different ports to cover their tracks. Others suspect that the submarine crews had been making a final supply run to the Antarctic base before returning to civilian life. Some of the

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submarines may never have returned. About 100 U-boats were never accounted for after the war. While some may have sunk or been captured by the Soviets and not reported, some think the others may have gone to the secret base in the Antarctic, and rumor has it that they are still there. Apparently, there are vast natural caverns inside the Antarctic where the Germans have created a thriving city for the Aryan race. They have a submarine and UFO base there, as well as advanced laboratories to genetically engineer a race of Aryan supermen. This would explain the numerous reports of “Nordic Aliens,” in UFO contactee stories. These Nordic Aliens often seem benign, appear human, and speak English with a German accent.

Opinions differ as to whether the Nazis got assistance from Inner Earth beings or aliens who simply use the interior of the Earth to hide their own bases. Many writers who follow the Nazi Antarctic base idea do not claim that the Earth is actually hollow, only that it has an immense network of underground caverns that can support an entire world of flora and fauna. Sometimes called the “Honeycombed Earth Hypothesis,” this idea was most popular with followers of the so-called Shaver Mystery (discussed further below).

While this particular branch of conspiracy theory is a battleground between Hollow Earth and honeycombed earth theorists, the concave Hollow Earth theorists got in on the game as well. Hitler, so they say, believed we lived on the inside of the sphere, and he even sent an expedition to try to see the British fleet by pointing their infrared cameras upwards. This was first put forward in the magazine *Popular Astronomy* , of all places, in its June 1946 issue. In the article titled “German Astronomy During the War,” it is revealed that the Nazis “considered it helpful to locate the British fleet, because the curvature of the earth would not obstruct observation. Visual rays were not suitable because of refraction; but infrared rays had less refraction. Accordingly a party of about ten men under the scientific leadership of Dr. Heinz Fischer, an infrared expert, was sent out from Berlin to the isle of Rügen to photograph the British fleet with infrared equipment at an upward angle of some forty-five degrees.”

Needless to say, there is no record of such an expedition, but it was top secret and so there wouldn’t be.

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One question that none of the conspiracy theorists can answer, however, is that if the Nazis had all this help from an advanced civilization, why did they lose the war?

The Strange Voyage of Admiral Byrd

Shortly after the war, the United States government decided to send a fleet down to Antarctica to survey a stretch of the coastline in the southern Atlantic, the same stretch of coastline surveyed and claimed by the Nazi expedition just before World War II. Dubbed Operation Highjump, the expedition caught the imagination of conspiracy and Hollow Earth theorists.

Part of the reason it raised so many eyebrows was its massive show of force. Commanded by Admiral Richard Byrd, a noted explorer of both the north and south poles, it included 13 ships, including an aircraft carrier, 23 aircraft, and some 4,700 men. Admiral Byrd (1888-1957) had quite the polar pedigree, and his exploits had been known to the public for two decades. He was supposedly the first person to fly over the North Pole along with crewmember Floyd Bennett on May 9, 1926. While this claim has been disputed, he and his crew certainly did become the first to fly over the South Pole on November 28–29, 1929. He also led many other extensive explorations in the Arctic and Antarctica.

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Byrd

Byrd was a darling of the press and did frequent interviews on radio and television. His ability to connect with mass audiences became just as important in building his career as his knack for leading polar expeditions. Thus, Operation Highjump kicked off to great fanfare and press coverage.

The public reason for visiting the Antarctic continent in the first summer after the war was to explore the area in the case of a future war. Byrd himself said in an interview shortly after the expedition that the United States government feared that, with the rapid advance of airplane technology, attacks on the United States and her allies might come from over the poles by airplanes.

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Naturally, the conspiracy theorists think there was another reason. The most common belief is that Admiral Byrd was searching for the lost Nazi Antarctic base, both to capture any war criminals on the run and to get any advanced technology that might have been there. Another possibility is that he, like his Nazi predecessors, was searching for an entrance into the Inner Earth.

Byrd himself never reported having seen anything amiss at the poles in any of his many expeditions. One would think that such an intrepid explorer would want the fame of having discovered holes at the pole.

A picture from Operation Highjump

Long after Operation Highjump, there was published his “secret diary” that says he did, indeed, have a secret mission during Operation Highjump. The diary covers the day of February 19, 1947. The first warning sign that this might not be a legitimate diary is that he opens with the line that this secret writing concerns “my Arctic flight,” when in fact he was in

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Antarctica at the time. He then repeats the mistake by saying that his plane flew northward.

"Byrd" tells of traveling past the frozen northern wastes and seeing strangely colored snow below. Most of it was yellow (which Byrd was wise enough not to eat), while other patches were reddish or purple. The plane's controls began to go haywire, and he had to struggle to maintain control. Then he crossed a previously unmapped mountain range, and at 1000 hours, he reported, "Beyond the mountain range is what appears to be a valley with a small river or stream running through the center portion. There should be no green valley below! Something is definitely wrong and abnormal here! We should be over Ice and Snow! To the portside are great forests growing on the mountain slopes. Our navigation Instruments are still spinning, the gyroscope is oscillating back and forth!"

He entered into a lush land full of vegetation, lakes, and rivers. He even saw what he took to be a woolly mammoth. He said he flew for 17 miles over this land, measuring the temperature at 74 degrees Fahrenheit, when his radio abruptly cut out. He had managed to report the mammoth sighting to base camp, though. At 1130 comes a hysterical entry: "Countryside below is more level and normal (if I may use that word). Ahead we spot what seems to be a city! This is impossible! Aircraft seems light and oddly buoyant. The controls refuse to respond! My GOD! Off our port and star board [sic] wings are a strange type of aircraft. They are closing rapidly alongside! They are disc-shaped and have a radiant quality to them. They are close enough now to see the markings on them. It is a type of Swastika!!! This is fantastic. Where are we! What has happened. I tug at the controls again. They will not respond! We are caught in an invisible vice grip of some type!"

A voice with a Germanic accent came out of his radio, telling him that they had taken over control of his plane and would land him safely. The plane stopped in midair and landed vertically. Once he had landed, he was greeted by several tall people with blonde hair who took him to a "large shimmering city pulsating with rainbow hues of color" that "seems to be made of a crystal material."

Byrd was told he was the guest of the Arianni, the inhabitants of the Hollow Earth lit by an internal sun. He had an audience with the king of the

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Arianni, who informed him that while most men are turned away so as to keep the Inner Earth a secret, Byrd was allowed to enter because of his high moral and ethical character. The king warned him that mankind was playing a deadly game by experimenting with atomic bombs and that they needed to learn to live in harmony, a common theme in UFO literature during the Cold War. Ever since the atomic explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Arianni had been sending their flying machines (the "Flugelrads") to check on the outer world.

The king went on to say that humanity must stop its rush to self-destruction and disarm. Admiral Byrd was entrusted with the task of bringing the message to the outer world. He was then let go, with the strange men of the Inner Earth saying goodbye to him in German.

Thus ends the diary except for two more entries. One is dated March 11, 1947 and reads, "I have just attended a staff meeting at the Pentagon. I have stated fully my discovery and the message from the Master. All is duly recorded. The President has been advised. I am now detained for several hours (six hours, thirty-nine minutes, to be exact.) I am interviewed intently by Top Security Forces and a medical team. It was an ordeal! I am placed under strict control via the national security provisions of this United States of America. I am ORDERED TO REMAIN SILENT IN REGARD TO ALL THAT I HAVE LEARNED, ON THE BEHALF OF HUMANITY! Incredible! I am reminded that I am a military man and I must obey orders."

The final entry was supposedly written late in Byrd's life, expressing the hope that the truth would come out after he passed on.

This secret diary gained widespread attention in the UFO community, and soon there were a slew of books regarding this city of the inner world, which many writers called Agartha. The name Agartha is possibly a corruption of Aryavartha, which in the Hindu Vedas is the birthplace of humanity. Other writers call this hidden city Shamballa, Sanskrit for "place of peace." In some sources, Agartha is the name for the Inner Earth in its entirety, while Shamballa is the hidden race's capital city. Arianni, of course, is a corruption of Aryans, hence the blonde hair, Germanic accents, and the swastikas on the flying machines.

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Detractors note that the writing style does not correspond with Byrd's other works, and that it is quite clumsy and uneducated, full of hysteria and exclamation points. Also, why a naval admiral would keep a secret diary and hide it from his government all his life, only to let it fall into the hands of the public at a much later date, is a bit hard to swallow. The diary is also relatively short. One would think that if Byrd wanted to tell the truth to future generations, he would have gone into greater detail. Besides, wouldn't such an inveterate explorer try to get back to Agartha and further explore the Inner Earth?

These inconvenient facts haven't deterred true believers, and to this day, the spurious diary gets just as much attention as Admiral Byrd's real accomplishments.

Beware the Deros

The Hollow Earth theory's effects on the genre of science fiction have already been discussed, but the influence flows in both directions, and the most shocking example of this is the strange life and writings of Richard Sharpe Shaver (1907-1975).

The 1940s and 1950s were a grand time for science fiction magazines. Great leaps in technology fired the imaginations of writers, and the threat of nuclear war fueled the fears of readers. Alongside this rapid technological development—and perhaps as a response to it—was an increase in interest in the occult and esoteric ideas. Richard Shaver was able to satisfy both.

Shaver had spent several years in a mental institution and had become convinced that there was a hidden underground world of both good and evil entities that controlled humanity with various rays. He wrote up his ideas in a story called "I Remember Lemuria," which was published as the cover story for the March 1945 issue of *Amazing Stories* .

Shaver's writing is truly atrocious, a muddle of eroticism, choppy sentences, and impenetrable metaphors. Here's one example from his later tale "The Dream Makers," which involves a human protagonist trying to convince one of the subterranean dwellers to protect him from an evil inhabitant of the Inner Earth: "I became another person now; the inward man. Pale forms of unsubstantial being that had haunted my slow memory leaped outward now and took on life. My inward eyes turned here and there

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searching myself for value to offer this enigmatic woman who asked why I was worth her effort—but always found only the cloying shapes of far-off beauties much too thin to be quite real or to be a goal or a pleasure to anyone. In the underworld the beauties of the mind must be very well formed and meaningful. Then one has a value as a dream-maker—for the mind is to them an open book. Terribly they taunted me, those half-seen things that I knew would be ecstatic fire if only I could reach their forms with my faint understanding. But I could not. I was a clod of melting mud, no reaching or grasping in my hands, no real seeing in my inward eyes."

While the prose reads like the product of a creative but somewhat unhinged mind, it struck a chord with readers, especially because the magazine's editor, Ray Palmer, told everyone that this was truth written up as fiction. Soon, *Amazing Stories* was inundated with mail from all over the United States and even foreign countries reporting similar stories of control by subterranean rays. Palmer claimed he got 50,000 letters about the first story alone.

Shaver and Palmer had touched a nerve, and Shaver's wild tales started appearing regularly in *Amazing Stories* and other magazines. The subsequent stories tell of an ancient race of aliens called Titans or Atlans (as in Atlanteans) who excavated a vast network of tunnels throughout the world (the "honeycomb earth" theory) but soon found that the radiation from the sun was hurting them. The radiation was making them die of old age, something they had never experienced before, so most left for another planet. Those that stayed behind mostly degenerated due to the sun's radiation into Deros, "Detrimental Robots," who were in fact living beings but robotic in their evil thinking.

Sadistic and cruel, the Deros liked nothing more than to eat and torture human captives, so they sent rays at those on the surface to cause wars and misery. These rays could see everything that happened on the surface and could cause emotions ranging from sexual excitement to murderous rage. Even daily troubles such as bouts of depression and minor accidents were their doing. If it were not for the benign intervention of the few noble, humanlike Teros, humanity would have no hope at all. The Teros, through medicine and advanced technology, had managed to stave off the worst of the sun's radiation, but they still aged rapidly, dying at an average age of 50.

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Shaver himself claimed to have been a prisoner in the Dero caves and subject to unspeakable tortures. He wrote at length of the treatment of female prisoners, whose sufferings can't be imagined. There is a great deal of unseemly titillation in Shaver's writings.

In addition to divulging the secrets of the inner world, Shaver also shared his knowledge of the ancient language Mantong, the source of all the languages of human history. Each sound in Mantong had a hidden meaning, and thus people could apply this code to any word in any language to discover its true meaning. Palmer was convinced, as was anyone who was gullible enough to take this linguistic Rorschach Test. Palmer claimed that he first learned about Shaver through a letter Shaver wrote him about Mantong. When Palmer tried it out and found that it worked, he asked how he had made this discovery. That led to the first of Shaver's many stories.

Shaver soon generated a cult following, and Shaver clubs and fanzines cropped up all over the nation. Sales of *Amazing Stories* skyrocketed, and issues with his stories always sold out, but the rest of the science fiction fandom was not impressed. There were many fans who were trying to get their genre taken more seriously, a struggle that continues with varied success to this day. They wanted to push science fiction in the direction of realistic scientific speculation—what's called "hard science fiction"—not the cheap, sexualized adventures that Shaver and so many other writers peddled. This hard science fiction faction launched a war of words against Shaver and Palmer in an effort to discredit them both. To Palmer's credit, he opened up the letters section of his magazine to the disbelievers and let the two sides slug it out in his pages, but the money won out, and the Shaver Mystery continued to make it onto the cover of the genre's leading magazine.

Amazing Stories finally stopped publishing Shaver's writings in 1948, with the craze having sputtered out, but that didn't stop the various Shaver fan clubs or smaller magazines from continuing to publish material on the Deros and Teros. Palmer himself published a small magazine called *The Hidden World* in the 1960s, and Shaver irregularly published a magazine called *Shaver Mystery Magazine* .

How much of the "Shaver Mystery" was simply made up by Palmer in order to sell copies? There is no proof of the influx of letters except for the

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editor’s word, and Ray Palmer was a showman, so he could have callously taken advantage of a madman’s ravings to make a quick buck (although to be fair, Shaver made a fair amount of money off the whole thing as well).

The Conspiracy Theories Continue

The 1960s saw a rise in all sorts of strange ideas and esoteric practices, fueled no doubt by the large amount of drugs in circulation at that time. One of the more popular books to come out was the 1964 volume *The Hollow Earth: The Greatest Geographical Discovery in History Made by Admiral Richard E. Byrd in the Mysterious Land Beyond the Poles- The True Origin of the Flying Saucers* by Raymond W. Bernard. Like many books of its kind, it’s a grab bag of odd ideas. Bernard seems to have taken anything and everything that struck his fancy and mixed it all up with the Hollow Earth theory.

A leader of the Rosicrucians, a San Francisco-based cult, Bernard included a large amount of esoteric and occult philosophy into his work. He claimed to have studied under Buddhist Lamas in Tibet and learned the wisdom of the ancient civilization of the Inner Earth. This civilization still exists and is responsible for the sightings of UFOs. He also incorporated work from previous writers, such as the notion that the Inuit originated from the northern polar hole and that Shaver was taught the theory of relativity from the Inner Earth dwellers long before Einstein came up with it.

The 1960s were a popular time for studying ancient religious sites, as well as distant, exotic spiritual places, and these became other entrances into the Hollow Earth. Now one need not freeze half to death to reach one of the polar holes; instead, one could descend through the tunnels under Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, Mt. Shasta in California, Mato Grosso in Brazil, Mt. Epomeo in Italy, King Solomon’s Mines in Ethiopia, and the pyramids of Giza in Egypt. Some of these tunnels are natural, like the vast system of caverns under Mammoth Cave, while others are manmade, such as those under the pyramids. These locations correspond to interstices of the bands of spiritual power that encircle the Earth, many of which have places of ancient worship built atop them.

Belief in the Hollow Earth seems to be on the rise, as is belief in the Earth being flat. Homemade documentaries on the subject abound on YouTube,

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and the leading Facebook group on the Hollow Earth has nearly 5,000 members. There's even one Facebook group that espouses the idea that the Earth is both hollow and flat. While the Flat Earth theory is much more popular at the present time, with even a few high-profile advocates in the entertainment industry, the Hollow Earth theory continues to spark the imagination of a dedicated few. Many of these believers hope that the Inner Earth contains hidden wisdom, whether in the form of lost cities or beneficent beings that will help the human race out of its current mess. There has always been a broad current of alternative religion in the Hollow Earth community, from the writings of Koresh through the hippie culture of the 1960s.

Thus, the Hollow Earth theory continues, and it now has many threads and many traditions. To delve into the online boards and current literature is to find many competing claims. A few still stick to the concave earth theory, while most go for the simpler Hollow Earth model where people live on the outside of a hollow sphere. The believers run the gamut of personality types, from pseudoscientists who try to prove their theories with dubious mathematics and photos of uncertain provenance to New Age believers who claim to be in mental contact with the enlightened beings of the underworld. Those who think that the inner world is used for alien bases make up a large faction, and there are even still some students of the Shaver Mystery.

In sum, the Hollow Earth theory provides people with whatever they are looking for, whether it's hope for the future, a bogeyman to hang their fears on, or the opportunity to be one of the select few to know the truth while the rest of the world is blind. That may explain, more than anything else, why such a bizarre set of ideas has endured for more than two centuries and will no doubt survive for centuries to come.

The Flat Earth Movement in the 20th Century

The theory of a Flat Earth endured throughout the 20th century, and though it remained on the margins, people still produced societies and publications about it. They tended to repeat the theories of earlier writers, such as the contention (to which Ptolemy agreed) that the Earth could not be spinning because there would be a terrible wind all the time.

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Gabrielle Henriet, in her 1957 book *Heaven and Earth* , claimed that the rate of spin is given by astronomers as 620 miles per hour (1,000 kilometers per hour), about the speed of an aircraft in her day. She asserted that “an aircraft flying at this rate in the same direction as that of the rotation could not cover any ground at all. It would remain suspended in mid-air over the spot from which it took off, since both speeds are equal. There would, in addition, be no need to fly from one place to another situated on the same latitude. The aircraft could just rise and wait for the desired country to arrive in the ordinary course of the rotation, and then land; although it is difficult to see how any plane could manage to touch ground at all on an airfield which is slipping away at the rate of 1,000 kilometres per hour. It might certainly be useful to know what people who fly think of the rotation of the Earth.”

The explanation is rather simple. The atmosphere rotates with the Earth, and since the planet is passing through a vacuum, there is no friction, and the Earth’s own gravitational field keeps the atmosphere moving with it. A useful metaphor for this is sitting inside an enclosed car going 100 miles per hour. If someone throws a ball up, it will not slam into their face because the ball is going at the same speed forward as the rider.

Henriet also claimed that mainstream science was wrong in its explanation for the change of seasons. It could not be because of the tilt of the Earth’s axis, because that would make tall buildings wobble from side to side.

After the demise of Lady Blount’s Universal Zetetic Society, Flat Earthers outside of a few minor religious sects had no organization within which to operate, but this problem was solved by Samuel Shenton (1903-1971), an English sign painter who in 1956 founded the International Flat Earth Research Society. He was inspired by the Zetetic Society, and his model of the planet was similar. According to him, the universe was infinite, with the Earth being a pit in an otherwise featureless plane. The Sun acted like a flashlight, beaming daylight to certain parts of the Earth over 365 day cycles. The Sun is 32 miles (51 kilometers) in diameter; 3,000 miles (4,800 kilometers) above the Earth. The Moon is the same size as the Sun but closer at 2,550 miles (4,100 kilometers) above the Earth.

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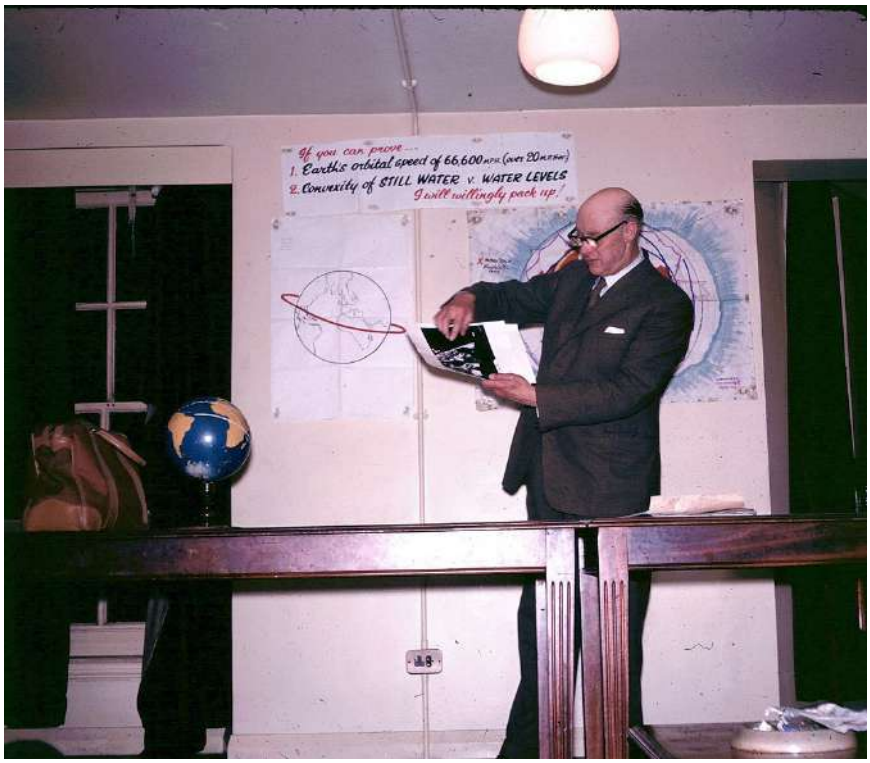
If you can prove...
1. Earth's orbital speed of 66,600 m.p.h. (over 20 miles/sec)
2. Convexity of STILL WATER v. WATER LEVELS
I will willingly pack up!

Keith Poole's picture of Samuel Shenton giving a lecture

Like most Flat Earthers before him, Shenton came at the theory from a religious perspective, unable to accept a round Earth when the Bible so clearly described a flat one. For his new society, however, he toned down the religious rhetoric in order to give it the broadest possible appeal, and he also seemed to be less power hungry than many Flat Earth organizers. He did not make himself president of his new society, instead naming himself secretary and tabbing the elderly William Mills, who had been in Lady Blount's circle, to run the show.

Shenton was a tireless promoter of his theories, talking to any group no matter how small and often appearing on television and radio. He was an engaging and personable speaker who earned the respect of many in the scientific community, including astronomer Patrick Moore, who ran the popular show *The Sky at Night* . Moore and Shenton debated on numerous occasions and Moore genuinely enjoyed Shenton's company, even as he skewered Shenton's ideas.

In the latter half of the 20th century, Flat Earthers had to contend with a new foe: astronauts. The Soviets launched the first satellite, Sputnik, in

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1957, but it did not remain the only satellite for long, and almost immediately, the Flat Earth movement had to explain images of the globe sent back by spacecraft. By the end of the 1960s, people also had to explain the Moon landing, and how communication and weather satellites worked.

The initial response to Sputnik by the Flat Earth Society in England was that a satellite moving above the Earth did not disprove their theory. After all, the Moon travels above the Earth at a higher altitude. Samuel Shenton quipped, “Would sailing round the Isle of Wight prove that it were spherical?”

This sentiment could not hold for long, however, because a few years later, astronauts were orbiting the globe and then going to the Moon. Communications satellites ringed the Earth, and weather satellites sent back thousands of pictures of the globe. The most common response to these problems was that it was all a hoax, and that the Soviets, the Americans, and later the Europeans, Chinese, Indians, and other nations were all making up stories about sending satellites and people into space. It was all part of a vast conspiracy to fool people about the shape of the Earth.

Just why the governments of the world would do such a thing is a bit of a mystery. Many Flat Earthers claim they simply don’t know what the powers-that-be are hiding. Others say that it’s all part of a mind control plan, or that the space agencies needed to justify their inflated budgets. Still others claim that since the governments have been caught in the lie, they can’t admit the truth without losing their credibility.

Flat Earthers also struggle to explain why none of the thousands of people employed by NASA and other space agencies over the decades have ever come forward with the truth. One would think that such a revelation would mean instant stardom and lucrative book and television deals. The general consensus is that a combination of fear and fat paychecks keep the employees in line, though others explain this away by claiming there really aren’t that many people in on the secret. As one commentator of a Flat Earth YouTube video put it, most NASA employees are janitors or security guards, so how many people have to lie?

Somewhat paradoxically, during the height of the Space Race in the 1960s, the Flat Earth Society saw a rise in membership thanks to the

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publicity coming from the new astronomical feats and from Shenton's media appearances. After the Moon missions by the Soviet Union and the United States, however, membership tailed off, and it was becoming harder to defend the Flat Earth model in the face in insurmountable evidence. In 1966, Shenton published *The Plane Truth* , a pamphlet whose stated purpose was to "re-establish in young people, FAITH in The Creator and a truer conception of their earth environment." In it, he complained, "Many want information regarding the Society. Actually now very few in numbers. And as you can well imagine, we being opposed to accepted Godless thought and the devilish mode of indoctrination which forces unproven THEORIES into the minds of the young student or pupil, no monies, grants or assistance whatever is available to us. One or two very worthy men, now greatly aged, remain from the former Universal Zetetic Society." Shenton urged his readers to study the Moon missions through the lens of Zetetic thought in order to find out the truth behind what he implied must be a massive misunderstanding of those foolish scientists.

A letter to the editor of *The Plane Truth* reflected this concern with godless thought:

> "The name given to the 'Moonship' by someone in the N.A.S.A. organization, was 'Apollo', one of the great divinities of the Greeks. All sudden deaths were believed to be the effect of the arrows of Apollo. Reported 27.1.67, the sudden deaths of the three American astronauts whilst testing the 'space' vehicle on the firing site at Cape Kennedy. Again, Florence, Italy, 'suddenly' smitten by deluge of overflowing ARNO. The Apollino representation of the god is associated with Florence.
>
> "The thought behind these remarks is that greater care should be taken when applying names to such vehicles … we cannot affront The Creator just as we please. I suggest that the long standing insult to God, in that we prefer to believe godless men regarding the figure of this earth environment in which we are 'placed' has yet to be visited upon us!"

Shenton, in discussing the early Apollo flights (before the Apollo 11 landing in 1969), repeated the mistake of numerous Flat Earthers before him: "I would like to direct your attention to the stated fact of the 5.500

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miles of the Atlantic test range and the timing 39 1/2 minutes to splashdown. The Apollo craft would have to cross the equator. This we are taught is turning at no mean speed of 1.000 m.p.h. Fine shooting to hit target which is ripping away from original estimated position. No need to mention or aggravate the searching thoughts aroused by making any mention of the supposed, theorised, orbital speed. No I think it will stand clear that our polar projection map indicates truly that the 'preprogrammed' orbits of missiles or capsules do not go beyond the 'ice barrier' over which we have not progressed. The sun, moon and many other bodies circulate within the same confines quite close to our earth's surface, but in an east to west motion. Most manmade satellites etc: are fired in the west-east direction."

The pamphlet also included a map of the Flat Earth with the "orbits" of the manned missions shown as elliptical paths over, thereby explaining how the images were taken. It is interesting that Shenton does not claim the missions were a hoax, a conspiracy theory that would come to the fore in later years.

Shenton also had an explanation for the fact that the curvature of the Earth can clearly be seen in many of the images: "Remember that all reproductions from photographs taken from rockets or capsules, are as the camera recorded the events, and NOT as viewed by the astronauts human vision. The camera distorted horizons have always been a misleading factor with those who have not freed their minds from the 'Planet' or 'Globe' earth indoctrination. Three or four years ago, the U.S.I.S. booklet 'Science Horizons' … carried a note to the effect that the Americans hoped to produce a lens which would NOT distort level horizons. So far I am not aware that such aid to truer photography has yet been made available. Flat Earthists however can prove that due to the known laws of perspective, the horizon, optically, rises and remains level with the observer's, or the camera's, eye, no matter what height is achieved. In fact the earth immediately beneath balloon, airplane, rocket or capsule, presents a dish-shaped or concave appearance. The point of earth immediately below the vehicle is the lowest. It is NOT the highest point of your 'globe' earth with the dip or curvature of the 'ball' sweeping away downwards to an horizon far away below the eye level!"

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Shenton's death in 1971 took away the movement's most valuable asset. By then, the membership of the International Flat Earth Research Society had fallen to fewer than 100. Indeed, Shenton predicted before his passing that the movement would die due to the constant attacks by mainstream science.

For a time, that appeared to be the case. Ellis Hillman (1928-1996) took over the helm but did little work for the society because he was pursuing a career in Labour Party politics. The movement thus continued to founder.

Luckily for Flat Earthers, help came in the form of Charles K. Johnson, an airplane mechanic from California. Shenton's widow did not trust Hillman, whom she saw as an opportunist, so she gave Johnson a large portion of her late husband's library. Johnson founded the International Flat Earth Research Society of America, and as a Biblical literalist, he also founded the Covenant People's Church, a fundamentalist sect.

Johnson had more energy and resources than the impoverished, perpetually ill Shenton, and under his direction the movement grew once again. He produced a steady stream of booklets and a regular journal titled *Flat Earth News* , and he became the first main public advocate to insist the space program was a hoax. According to Johnston, the governments of the world were trying to lead the people away from the truth of the Bible through a massive campaign of fake news, and that the American and Soviet governments were cooperating in this fraud in order to enrich themselves and their elite friends. He claimed the Moon landing was filmed on a set and scripted by science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke. Johnson also spoke out against evolution and other scientific findings that contradicted Scripture.

The *Flat Earth News* was a mixture of fundamentalist polemics and attempts at scientific reasoning. The organization developed a slightly different model of the Flat Earth, with the North Pole at the center and the continents surrounding it, all ringed by a wall of ice 150 feet (45 meters) high. The Sun and Moon are each 32 miles (52 kilometers) in diameter, with the Sun 3,000 miles from the surface, Heaven a bit further away, and the Moon a bit closer.

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Through hard work and a talent for causing controversy, Johnson built the movement to something bigger than it had ever been before, asserting that membership in the society reached a peak of 3,500. He had a flair for publicity and labeled people who supported the idea of a globe as "Greaseballs" because they would slide right off the Earth if it was a globe. He liked to show a photo of his wife in Australia, pointing out that she was standing upright, and not upside down as she would be if the Earth were a globe.

Tragedy struck in 1997 when a house fire destroyed the membership list and many of his publications. His wife died the same year, and Johnson followed her to the grave in 2001.

Flat Earthers not only had to contend with hostile scientists and public derision, but even an enemy from within. In 1970, the Flat Earth Society of Canada was formed, and its leaders were a philosophy professor at St. Thomas University named Leo Ferrari, writer Raymond Fraser, and poet Alden Nowlan. At first, Flat Earthers hailed their friends north of the border as fellow travelers, but this new society seemed hell bent on being even more outrageous than regular Flat Earthers. They claimed that all of society's evils, from racism to misogyny, were because people followed the "globulist" model rather than being "planoterrestrialists" like them. Ferrari published a scholarly article, "Feminism and Education in a Flat Earth Perspective," which appeared in the *McGill Journal of Education* . The society's motto was: "The earth is flat; any fool can see that."

Ferrari and Nowlan made numerous media appearances and began to gather attention, but since most of the requests for membership came from the United States, they changed the organization's name to The Flat Earth Society in 1973. By the following year, the society had about 100 members.

Activity remained strong into the 1980s, but not everyone believed Ferrari and his friends were sincere. They put a dash of humor into everything they did, something lacking from the more earnest Flat Earthers. In 1990, the society helped produce the documentary *In Search of the Edge* by Pancake Productions, and red flags went up in the Flat Earth community when it was revealed that the Ontario Arts Council and National Film Board of Canada were helping with the funding. After all, why would a hostile government that claimed to have launched satellites be funding a Flat Earth program?

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It turned out the suspicions were justified. The documentary was a joke, made to be shown in schools to teach children how ridiculous ideas can be made palatable if told in a convincing way. The study guide handed out to accompany the film made it clear that the society was a joke, its founders are "globularists," and that everyone should hone their critical thinking skills. As the catalog description for *In Search of the Edge* put it:

> "The film is comprised of the conventional documentary mix of elements, including interviews with experts, stock footage, still photographs and animation, and is woven together with the story of Andrea Barns, a Canadian woman who devoted her life to convincing the world that the earth is flat.
>
> "This is an essential lesson in media literacy for a generation plugged into television. Provoke critical thinking in your students and help them to become aware of the devices used in documentary media; the history of scientific paradigms; and their own willingness to take things at face value."

Naturally, the Flat Earth advocates were not amused. They were the ones who always claimed that others took things at face value, and for the same accusation to be leveled at them was insufferable.

The Internet

The Flat Earthers remained on the fringes throughout the 20th century, but a new invention gave their movement a shot in the arm: instantaneous global communication via the Internet. Almost overnight, people who thought they were alone in their beliefs could form communities to discuss their ideas and find a sympathetic ear. Discussion groups on conspiracy theories abounded, and the "information superhighway" immediately became the world's biggest tool for spreading ignorance.

The Flat Earth Society, which had been moribund since Johnson's death in 2001, was revived in 2004 by Daniel Shenton (no relation to Samuel Shenton), and this time the society took a new form by coalescing around an Internet discussion forum. The forum grew to tens of thousands of members, started a wiki, and included sections for a great deal of Flat Earth literature both modern and historic. In 2009, the society was officially relaunched, and in its press release, Shenton said that while traditionally the

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society had spread the word through newsletters and pamphlets, “Technology has moved on and we’re thrilled to be able to reach a much broader audience with our message. The Internet is an amazing tool for communication … I think we’re capturing the public’s imagination and that’s very important. I realise that our views are still considered highly unorthodox, but people are beginning to ask questions and that’s the first step in a long process of truth-seeking.”

Shenton was entirely correct about the impact that instant online communication would have on the Flat Earth movement. In fact, for the first time, it truly did become a movement. Thousands of people joined the online forums, and it wasn’t long before podcasts and YouTube channels were added to the mix. People who would have otherwise never heard of such theories were now exposed to them, media coverage helped fuel the fire, and an increasing number of celebrities came out supporting the Flat Earth theory. Each time one did, there would be another media feeding frenzy and more people would check out the Flat Earth movement out of curiosity.

There are now countless websites and online forums espousing the Flat Earth view. One of the most popular is that of the Flat Earth Society, which is still going strong with a forum containing tens of thousands of posts and an extensive wiki covering the most commonly asked questions about the theory, famous figures, and historic texts from founding fathers such as Rowbotham and Carpenter.

Twitter also constantly has lively discussions, with Flat Earthers often deriding those who think the Earth is round with the disparaging hashtag #globetards. Much of the content is self-reinforcing, with users laughing among each other about how stupid their counterparts are. This is a common trait with Flat Earth online communities, where members spend much of their time praising each other for having seen through society’s delusions and coming to the real truth.

Of course, they aren’t the only ones laughing. Many people online often poke fun at the Flat Earthers, and there are numerous mock Twitter feeds, including the Dinosaur Earth Society, which claims the Earth is shaped like a dinosaur and challenges anyone to prove otherwise.

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One of the most powerful recruitment tools for the Flat Earth movement is YouTube, where there has been an explosion of podcasts and amateur documentaries pushing the Flat Earth idea. Many of these have racked up thousands of views, and perhaps the most popular channel is run by Mark Sargent, who has more than 77,000 subscribers and more than 16 million total views. The prolific YouTuber regularly uploads podcasts, interviews, and meeting reports for the many regional and international Flat Earth conventions that happen all around the world. Sargent has become a celebrity in the Flat Earth movement.

Another celebrity is Robbie Davidson. While Sargent takes on the globe theory with a mixture of free thinking and conspiracy theory, Davidson is firmly in the fundamentalist Christian camp. The description on his YouTube channel, Celebrate Truth (which has more than 136,000 subscribers and more than 19 million views), states, ““To promote God's Truth and expose the world’s lies. What if everything that NASA & Science has taught you about the earth, sun, moon, stars & space was a lie? What is Satan wanted to destroy the foundations of God’s Word with perverting the truth of the enclosed flat earth we live in from the very start? It might sound crazy but take the journey and study this topic because it might be the most shocking truth you’ve ever discovered about the world you live in. Open your bible and read all the verses describing God’s creation again. Evolution is a lie and teaching nothing more than you were just an accident in a big bang. Monkey Man Science is all part of the great deception. Don’t believe the lies.”

Flat Earthers are finding a community offline as well. There are numerous Flat Earth meet-up groups in cities around the world, and conventions are bringing in hundreds and sometimes even thousands of members. There’s even a Flat Earth cruise scheduled for 2020. As the *Guardian* wryly pointed out, marine navigation relies on the principle that the world is round, as GPS (the Global Positioning System) is done through the use of 24 satellites orbiting the Earth and a ship needs three GPS satellites to triangulate its position.

Current Beliefs

Fundamentalist Christians have been the backbone of the Flat Earth movement since its very beginning, and the upsurge in the number of

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Christians who interpret the Bible literally, thus rejecting scientific notions such as evolution, has created a fertile recruiting ground for the Flat Earth movement.

The Flat Earth theory has also gained some support in the Islamic world. Like Christians, they point to Bible verses that indicate a Flat Earth, and they also cite texts from their own holy books and scholars. Some of these texts are given in a small, anonymously written pamphlet titled *Earth is Flat: And There Is No Dar al-Islam Today* . It includes several passages from the Koran that talk about Allah spreading out the Earth like “a bed” and creating the “canopy” of the sky. The implication, of course, is that the world is flat and the sky is a dome, although nowhere in the Koran does it explicitly say this.

The pamphlet also goes on to give several quotes from Muslim scholars that claim the world is flat. For example, the pamphlet notes, “Al-Qahtani said in his *Nuniyya* : The astronomer and the soothsayer and their kind lie, they claim they possess the knowledge of Allah. For them both the earth is spherical and they have this statement in common. And the earth is flat for the people of intellect based on the true proof of the clear Quran.” All too conveniently, the anonymous author ignored all the respected Muslim scholars who argued for a spherical Earth.

The pamphlet also asserts that the Moon emanates light and does not reflect light from the Sun. This is based on the fact that the Arabic world for the Moon is *nur* , which means “light,” not “reflection of light.”

As a parallel to the idea of the Flat Earth being surrounded by a ring of mountains, there is discussion of a mountain called Qaf that surrounds the world and on which the edges of the sky rest upon.

As final proof, the back cover shows a flat Earth and a globe Earth, with Muslims bowing to the Kaaba in Mecca, as devout Muslims do five times a day. In the globe Earth, the Muslims aren’t facing directly at Mecca due to the curvature of the Earth. Only on a flat Earth are Muslims able to directly face Mecca as Allah intended.

There are also several videos online of Islamic preachers stating the world is flat. One Saudi preacher in an online video echoed Gabrielle Henriet’s

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point that the Earth couldn't be spinning because when someone throws a ball up in the air, it goes straight up and down.

On the other hand, the vast majority of Muslim public figures say the Earth is a globe. A video by popular Muslim commentator Sheikh Assim al-Hakeem says that the Koran only speaks of the world being flat and the sky a canopy because that's how people see it. In other words, it is not meant to describe how the world is actually shaped. He goes on to say that there is evidence in the Koran to show the world is round and that scholars are unanimous that this is the case.

Another commentator, Dr. Zakir Naik, says it has been proven the Earth is a globe and discusses scientific errors in various passages of the Bible discussed before, such as Matthew 4:8, Luke 4:5, Daniel 4:10-11, First Book of Chronicles 16:30, Psalms 93:1, and John 10:30. These verses suggest the Earth is flat and immovable, and Dr. Naik pointed them out to imply that the Koran is the purer, more reliable document.

It is unclear what percentage of the world's Muslim population believe they are standing on a Flat Earth, but considering that popular Muslim commentators are so often asked about the shape of the Earth, the idea seems to be gaining traction in the Muslim world as well as the Christian world.

As strange as it may sound, there are some teams of Flat Earth researchers who are trying to prove their theories through scientific experiments. Much like the Bedford Level experiments were used to "prove" the Earth was flat, a similar experiment was recently conducted by a group of Flat Earthers for the documentary *Behind the Curve* . A small group of investigators called Globe Busters set up two boards on an expanse of shallow, calm water with holes 17 feet (5.18 meters) above the surface of the water. One member stood behind one of the holes while another member went a long distance away from the boards with a light. If the Earth was flat, it wouldn't matter how far the light was away from the boards because it would still shine through the holes, but if the Earth is curved to the amount that scientists claim, then the man with the light would have to hold it up to 23 feet (7 meters) for it to be visible through the holes. To the Flat Earthers' chagrin, when the light was turned on and held at 17 feet, it was not visible through the holes. The viewer then asked the man with the light to raise it to 23 feet

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(7 meters). The light shone through, confirming that because of the curvature of the Earth, the man with the light was lower down than the two holes.

Another experiment highlighted in the documentary involved a gyroscope. Spinning gyroscopes, due to the specific physics of their construction, will always remain in the original position in which they started spinning no matter what the surface they are on does. Thus, they will "tilt" in relation to the surface of the Earth, because the surface itself is what is tilting.

Flat Earth YouTuber Bob Knodel invested $20,000 in an extremely accurate and well-made laser gyroscope to test whether the Earth was spinning. With a spinning globe, the gyroscope will drift 15 degrees per hour thanks to the Earth's spin, and when Knodel and his assistants ran the experiment, that is exactly what they found.

In both cases, the Flat Earthers did not accept the results of their own scientific experiments. It's safe to assume they would have eagerly accepted the results if the results matched their expectations.

In 2018, one daring Flat Earther literally took the experimentation to a higher level. "Mad" Mike Hughes completed work on a homemade rocket and launched himself into the sky, hoping to see the edges of the Flat Earth for himself. The experiment got a flurry of media attention, with Hughes launching from a remote spot in the Mojave Desert. The rocket, made of scrap metal for about $20,000, only made it 1,875 feet into the air before deploying its parachutes and coming down on the desert floor. Fortunately, Hughes emerged unscathed aside from a sore back.

Undaunted, he vowed to make a better rocket, and next time, he said, he'd prove the Earth was flat once and for all.

Online Resources

Other mysterious titles by Charles River Editors

Other titles about Flat Earth on Amazon

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